

**SUBJECTIVITY REGAINED? GERMAN-LANGUAGE WRITING FROM EASTERN  
EUROPE AND THE BALKANS THROUGH AN EAST-WEST GAZE**

by

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This project uncovers the role of recent German-Balkan works in articulating transnational identity in and through literature. Drawing on social and political models of European identity representations as well as on studies on stigma, trauma, and diasporic cultures as distinct historical formations, I contend that migrant fictions from Eastern Europe and the Balkans not only illuminate the concepts and demarcations operative in European collective imaginations but also introduce an Eastern European/Balkan dimension regarding the formation of modern identities *beyond* a national focus. To investigate this process, I focus on three Eastern European expatriates: the Bulgarian-born German and Austrian writers Rumjana Zacharieva and Dimitre Dinev and the Russian-German Wladimir Kaminer. The dissertation begins with an overview of postcolonial and Western theories of subjectivity and hybridity within the context of German literary-critical discourse on alterity, migration, and Turkish-German writings to argue that the historical and cultural context from which Eastern Europe/the Balkans have developed as Europe's "Other within" requires a reconfiguration of present theoretical models. In historiographic fashion, this thesis emphasizes the role of Ottoman and Soviet legacies and Western domination on the formation of Balkan subaltern identities. Attending to a tradition of Balkanist discourse that engages the internal bipolar demarcation of Balkan identities as part

Western, part Oriental, I reconsider in chapters 3 and 4 how Dinev and Zacharieva's writings negotiate the experience of migration from East to West and articulate particular kinds of Balkan identities as a response to competing representations of the Balkans and the West. In the fifth chapter, my application of the Russian discourse on itself and Europe in examining Kaminer's works transcends the discussion of migration and Balkan identities to offer a related, yet differentiated, account of the manifold processes that surround other Eastern European writings in German. By analyzing these narratives through an East-West lens, the study shows how thinking about identity and migration in literary and historical perspectives proves useful for understanding the shifting identities and borders in Germanic Europe and beyond.

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## **PREFACE**

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 “BEYOND THAT LINE IS NOTHING, A GREAT BLANK.” EUROPE, GERMANY, AND THE EASTERN IMAGINATION

“This is where I am. Round me are  
Germany, Belgium, this is France, that’s England, down there is Italy, and,  
yes, then there are Spain and Portugal as well, and here is a line. Beyond  
that line is nothing, a great blank...”

(Dubravka Ugrešić quoting a friend in “Nice People Don’t Mention Such Things” 299)

In her article “Nice People Don’t Mention Such Things” (1998), the Croatian writer and Nobel Prize winner Dubravka Ugrešić (born in 1949) remarks of *Others* and *frontiers* that “these are the conceptual points around which Europe has built its identity” (303). Indeed, European geographic, political, and cultural cartography has registered over time numerous instances of reshaping, redrawing, erasing, and creating borders that have ultimately included and excluded certain areas and brought different imagined Others to play essential roles in the formation of European identity. As the latest in the sequence of historical events, the eastward expansion of Europe, along with the intensified migration to and within the Old Continent, has presented a great challenge not only to European mental and physical imaginaries and the officially hailed

“European” identity but also to the concept of *alterity*, or the question of who is defined as the Other. Needless to say, the age-old symbolic division of Europe into West and East has resurfaced in a variety of ways with the EU’s expansion eastwards. Instead of the “dissolution of Eastern Europe,” we are witnessing its “multiplication” of various internal Europes and peripheral Easts (Kuus, “Europe’s eastern Expansion” 484). An interesting case is the resurgent debate over Central Europe in the 1980s, one that after 1990 was transformed from a cultural idea to a useful political implement in the competition for entry into the European Union. Being an inherently Eastern European idea (i.e., different from the German idea of “Mitteleuropa”),<sup>1</sup> the Central European politico-cultural project culminated in the creation of a symbolic geographic hierarchy of Eastern Europe with the triad, Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, as the bearers of human values, cultures, and traditions, and Russia and the Balkan states as their opposite.

Even more striking in this brief account are the attitudes that are deeply rooted in the Western imaginary, according to which Europe is materialized in the old figure of an enlightened West starkly contrasted to the ghostly presence of a silent and absent East. As the opening quote illustrates, while the Iron Curtain disappeared at the end of the Cold War, it did not dissolve divisions between Europe and its eastern backyard but merely solidified in the 1990s into a biased image of the inherently different European East, unworthy of (self)representation and attention. Although the West’s interest in the history and cultures of Eastern Europe has gradually grown over the last twenty-two years, we witness (even today) how certain policies of the enlarged EU towards its Eastern neighbors tendentiously continue to inscribe the politically

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<sup>1</sup> “Mitteleuropa” is the German equivalent of “Central Europe,” but it is premised on the Germans’ understanding of their country as the core of Europe, not only in geographical terms but also politically and culturally.

and economically integrated postcommunist East into an abject position as a “not-a-part-of-our-world-and-history” coalition.<sup>2</sup> The validation is rooted in the widespread belief that, as Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen remark, “communism was in essence an anti-European philosophy to which the quasi-Oriental East had been geographically predisposed” (*The Myth of Continents* 60). I contend that when viewed from such a perspective of still existing divisions, the EU eastern enlargement produced a new dialectics of identity that has reconfigured local and national identities as well as existing constellations of Others. And this, I argue, was oftentimes done against the much-vaunted idea of a harmonious European identity. I see such reconfigurations of identity not as a threat to the construction of a common European space and identity but as an organizing metaphor that explains how Europe is slowly becoming reimagined from a model built on fixed yet lingering West/the rest binaries into a model of complementary, dynamic and intersecting nonhierarchical dualisms. Such dualisms open up spaces not only for shared values and common heritages, but also for manifold belongings, divergent experiences, and split loyalties.

The centrality of such identity reconfigurations is best illustrated by members of diasporic communities. The overarching goal of this study is thus to draw attention to the particular demarcation and reconfiguration of Balkan and Eastern European imaginary identities as they emerged in a particular historical moment in the course of intra-European migration—the

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<sup>2</sup> In the context of Germany and Austria, there has been a revitalization of the cultural contacts between these two countries and the Balkans. Notable in this respect is the public work of the Bulgarian cultural institute in Vienna, Haus Wittgenstein, whose initiatives include the organization of music and dance concerts, art exhibitions and academic conferences, and the publication of academic research on German/Austrian relationship with Bulgaria and translations of Bulgarian writers. In Germany, too, a great number of film festivals, conferences, and concerts have taken place over the last few years, bringing into focus different cultures of Eastern Europe. Most current in this respect is the Filmwoche “Ausgerechnet Bulgarien” in Munich (May 12-18, 2011), where viewers can acquaint themselves with one of the EU’s younger members and the most recent achievements of Bulgarian cinema.

dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. If we consider historical, anthropological, and social research in Europe and the U.S. in the late 1990s and early 2000s, we will notice that scholars have by now well documented and widely discussed the significance of Eastern Europe and the Balkans for European identity formation. Despite such attention, cultural and literary studies at that time presented a disengagement from the complexities of Southeastern and Central Europe in favor of simplified binaries such as West versus East. Yet in the last two to three years, we can discern a refreshing tendency among literary researchers to move beyond past attitudes of disengagement. German scholars like Hannes Schweiger, Erika Berroth, and Martin Hielscher have drawn attention to the importance of migrant narratives from Southeastern Europe as instances of transnational writing in German and the questions associated with it. In so doing, the work of these scholars has confirmed Monika Spiridon's observation that the Balkans and Central Europe "disguise various geopolitical, ideological, cultural, economic, and aesthetic alternatives"; alternatives that deserve greater consideration in present discussions concerned with the definitional bog of cultural alterity ("Identity Discourses" 377).

It is on account of this discourse on Europe and issues of alterity that I regard the cultural practices of migrant and displaced communities as important in studying the mechanisms that activate and destabilize existing West/East confrontations and framings of Otherness and further create new lived and imagined realities as sites of boundary and identity-forming traversals and transgressions. I am not concerned, however, with the ethnographic aspect of identity construction and representation (i.e. everyday cultural practices). Rather, my dissertation examines the cultural practices of literary narratives that represent already mediated articulations of the experience of Otherness. Dimitre Dinev, Rumjana Zacharieva, and Wladimir Kaminer come from the Balkans and the former Soviet Union and have established themselves

professionally as authors in their new homelands of Austria and Germany. The German-language fiction they have produced engages in manifold ways the space of Europe (Germany, Austria, Bulgaria, and Russia) as a site of shifting borders, within and across which nations are reimagined, values contested, symbolic tropes rearticulated, and experiences relived. The present literary-critical project engages these aspects within the immediate historical context in which Dinev, Zacharieva, and Kaminer's narratives were born—the period between 1998 and 2005. It was a period when Bulgaria was still years away from being a EU member, and neither Zacharieva nor Dinev enjoyed the privilege that comes with the European Union or the Austrian citizenship they later acquired. The dawn of the new millenium was a favorable time for Kaminer, for whom the dissolution of the Soviet Union and his status as a *Kontingentflüchtling* in Germany opened up less inhibited opportunities in making a living and a career abroad. Following diverse pathways to success, these writers have produced literature that represents both the official and unofficial historical contexts and oftentimes muted traditions in which migrant experiences unfold and identities are negotiated.

The aim of this project is to unveil Dinev, Zacharieva, and Kaminer's literary voices, however unfamiliar or disquieting, and to attend to their stories of dislocation and of reinvention in another language and culture. Their voices could not be more relevant to the dilemmas that our post-Cold War world faces at present. For their stories of integration lie at the heart of EU debates on current (trans)national transformations, citizenship, limits of tolerance, legal rights, and policymaking. What can we learn from Dinev, Zacharieva, and Kaminer's tales about the alternative remappings of Western (Germanic), Eastern European (Russian), and Balkan (Bulgarian) imaginaries, all part of Europe today? Who or what has returned to Europe's heartlands to trouble the homogeneity of Western nations and cultures by bringing to light the

ghostly faces of Europe's stigmatized margins, their fears, their hopes, and their visions? How do we then conceptualize subjectivity in crisis in a Europe positioned at the crossroads of globally important geopolitical, cultural, and economic transitions? Addressing these questions can help untangle the complex global web into which nations, cultures, peoples, and political and economic interests in today's Europe are enmeshed.

## **1.2 METHODOLOGY IN FOCUS: HOW POSTCOLONIAL IS GERMAN-LANGUAGE LITERATURE FROM THE BALKANS AND EASTERN EUROPE?**

It is worthwhile to note that from most of the discourses that are currently dominant on the European and North American cultural and academic scenes, the discourse on postcolonialism has gained new life and force, making postcolonial studies more urgent than before. As Étienne Balibar observes in his book *We, the People of Europe?*, "European populations today [...] are [in fact] all postcolonial communities, or [...] projections of global diversity within the European sphere" (7). His words signal present concerns about ethnic, national, and racial exclusions and the exploding disparities between wealth, health, power, centrality, and political systems across East and West, and North and South. These are concerns that take into account not only the global processes of migration but also invoke the historical legacy of colonialism as a condition that has not passed away. Nicholas Dirks contends that the end of the Cold War has made this condition particularly visible as the West's numerous encounters with its Others have awoken anew, in Huntingtonian fashion, civilizational clashes, imperial ambitions, and obsessions ("Postcolonialism" 267).

The merits of postcolonial criticism for cultural and literature studies in Western as well as in Eastern Europe should by no means be underestimated. A good example is the field of Central European Studies, which has updated and imported postcolonial theoretical paradigms into current debates concerned with the cultural and historical legacy of East Central Europe (Reisenleitner, “Central European Culture” 3). Academic discussions concerned with East Central Europe as a postcolonial entity have underscored the potential of theories of Otherness, marginality, and subalternity for explaining the peculiar forms of multiple dependencies, inequalities, hierarchies, and forms of colonial imaginations reflected in current sociocultural patterns of European governmentality. Returning to Edward Said, whose study *Orientalism* was the first to launch a critique of colonialism, we are reminded of Europe’s imperial-colonial past when the West first produced and then discursively circulated over time an image of the East as a quintessentially different and inferior cultural Oriental realm against which the Occident asserted its superiority and progressiveness.

Today, as the Orient advances westward into the Old Continent’s heartland in the figure of the migrant, European nations are threatened by fear of cultural and ethnic contamination, and, consequently, of losing their unambiguous European identity. Attending to such pressing issues, European and North American literary and cultural scholars have resorted to the intellectual inheritance of postcolonial thought to revise existing concepts of heterogeneous identities, crosscultural experiences, and multiple tensions in the narratives of postcolonial and displaced communities, and what this ultimately means for Europe’s future. Drawing on concepts advanced by postcolonial theorists like Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, critics have underscored the search for a cultural analysis that views literary texts by Third World writers in Britain and France as “a terrain of power struggles and cultural representations



and insists on the discursive construction of identities and spaces” (Reisenleitner 2). In the case of German literary criticism, postcolonial theories of hybridity, alterity, and performativity have offered a fruitful basis for approaching the historical labor migration processes in the Federal Republic after 1960, processes that fractured the ethnic homogeneity of the German *Kulturnation* and further unleashed the question: Who are we? and, more importantly, Who are we not? Interestingly, Germany’s most contemporary Other is tightly bound to the centuries-old Orientalist discourse of the Ottoman Other, as is the “Turk” who entered the country, not as a conqueror nor as a colonized subject, but as an invited labor migrant in the 1950s. Now in their third generation, Turkish-Germans have produced a large body of crossborder narratives that have moved their literature into its third phase—*Literatur der Post-Integration*. Viewed as a new form of literary self-imag(in)ing, Turkish-German texts of postintegration have offered their audiences the option of a third textual space of interaction where traditional representational discourses of Turkish and German, Eastern and Western, and Oriental and European identities can be introduced to alternate interpretations.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The theme of a displaced foreigner struggling for identity and experiencing difficulties integrating that are often linked with injustice and discrimination on the part of German bureaucracy and society was one of the commonly described themes in first generation writers like Aras Ören (Turkey), Franco Biondi (Italy), Rafik Schami (Syria), Jusuf Naoum, (Turkey), Zafer Şenocak (Turkey), and others, whose works represented the first phase of migrant’s literature, the so-called *Literatur der Betroffenheit* (*literature of concernedness*). This phase was followed by one described as *Kulturvermittlung* (*cultural mediation*), when authors such as Yüksel Pazarkaya (Turkey) propagated in their works cultural synthesis and political solidarity. Meanwhile, the immigrants living, working, and writing in Germany are in their third generation and increasingly speak German as their native language. Far removed from the political impetus of Biondi’s and Shami’s “literature of concernedness” and lacking Pazarkaya’s desire for a literature that mediates between cultures, the *post-integration* works of Feridun Zaimoğlu (*Kanaksprak* 1995) and Emine Sevgi Özdamar (*Das Leben ist eine Karawanserei* 1992) are charting new territories where cultural identities escape the confines of East/West dichotomies, and, in so doing, the multicultural appeal for assimilation into German society and the dramatic gesture toward self-assertion. Focusing on the elusiveness and ambiguity of identities and the fusion of linguistic and cultural traditions from both East and West, Zaimoğlu and Özdamar

If we are to situate the work of Eastern European and Balkan writers within the tradition of emerging transnational writing in German in the late 1990s and early 2000s, we will encounter an interesting disparity. Namely, most of these narratives have remained out of the reach of scholarship, despite the fact that: 1) Eastern European and Balkan writers began producing literature as early as the late 1970s, and their literary production reached its peak in the late 1990s, and that; 2) their fiction calls into question in an equally powerful manner notions of alterity, hegemony, victimhood, identity, and trauma. While this marginalization can be explained by the fact that Eastern European and Balkan authors continue to constitute a somewhat pan-European diaspora dispersed in small numbers in different Western European countries like Germany, Austria, France, and Spain, the pronounced persistence of this marginalization, in my view, signals a concealed gap that has more to do with the particular forms of Eastern European and Balkan cultural alterity as an Otherness of small differences, an Otherness that is internal to Europe, and, therefore, transitory and partial. My use of the phrase “Otherness of small differences” here builds on Freud’s term “narcissism of minor differences,” a term that Freud first introduced in a short paper “The Taboo of Virginité” (1918) and later used in his *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1929) to describe the existing gulf between cultures and peoples.<sup>4</sup> Taking the centuries-old hostility between North and South Germans, and the British and the Scotch as his example, Freud noted that what lays the foundation for one people’s fears

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make clear that today’s (trans)national literature is the product of historical, political, and cultural processes. As such, literature is not “an organic outgrowth of a homogeneous culture,” but a construct that is subject to constant reinterpretation, reevaluation, and regeneration (Kontje 231).

<sup>4</sup> In the context of the Balkans, Michael Ignatieff is perhaps the first to offer an appropriation of this Freudian term in his explanation of the atrocities during the Bosnian war in the 1990s, an analysis that also takes into account the question of modernity and its psychological effects on the individual. For more details, see Ignatieff’s *The Warrior’s Honor. Ethnic War and the Modern Consciousness* (1999).

of threat and aggressiveness are not the drastic differences that exist between human collectives but the slight differences that inform neighboring groups (72). As globalization and migration bring the East and the West of Europe closer together today, the minor differences that underlie the cultural alterity of the European East become more and more visible. A pale replica of the West, Eastern Europe left an intolerable blemish on Europe's face, causing the latter to react against its underdeveloped and poor (br)other with "innocent-indifferent ignorance" (Ugrešić 300).

The presence of this "innocent-indifferent ignorance," or what I term 'a concealed gap,' resounds in the words of the American-based German scholar Hiltrud Arens, who remarks in her study on hybrid identities in German-language writings from the 1980s that:

[d]eutschsprachige Autoren und Autorinnen aus osteuropäischen Ländern, wie z. L. Moníkova, Ota Filip, Herta Müller, Richard Wagner, werden selten im Zusammenhang der Migrantenliteratur genannt und oftmals als "deutsche" SchriftstellerInnen gehandelt. (*Kulturelle Hybridität* 52)

German-language writers from Eastern Europe such as L. Moníkova, Ota Filip, Herta Müller, and Richard Wagner are rarely mentioned in connection with migrant literature and oftentimes treated as "German" writers.

Arens further asks as to how we could explain such a discrepancy, "da doch für beide [Gruppen von AutorInnen] Deutsch als Fremdsprache gilt, wobei die einen aber der deutschen Literatur zugeordnet und die anderen als Unterkategorie behandelt werden" ("since for both [groups of authors] German is their second language, whereupon the former are considered a part of German literature and the latter its subcategory") (52). By quoting Gayatri Spivak that "it is the center that offers the official explanation," Arens concludes that the division of "deutsch"

(“German”), “türkisch” (“Turkish”), and “europäisch” (“European”) originates in Eurocentric conceptions of self/other prevalent in public and academic debates (53). Hence, the Turk as the “Andersaussehende” (“strange/other looking”) (Adelson, “Opposing Oppositions” 305) *and* so, different from the “nicht-so-ganz-ausländisch” (“not-so-foreign”) (Arens 53) has come to embody the perfect Other, or as Leslie Adelson has put it, “a kind of conflated, imaginary otherness” (306).

Arens’s (and by extension Adelson’s) words accentuate the ongoing struggles over traditional representations of the “Turk” as the contemporary extrapolated image of the Saidian Oriental Other in German thought.<sup>5</sup> The scholars’ focus on Turkish “minority literature” in Germany, however, has left intact the ‘unproblematic’ representation of other “not-so-foreign” looking Eastern Others in the Western imaginary. Iver B. Neumann remarks, “[t]here are many ‘Easts’ in the world, and none of them is without signification” in social, literary, and cultural studies of alterity and migration (*Uses of the Other* 15). Consequently, what makes Dinev, Kaminer, and Zacharieva particularly interesting for this project is the fact that these authors come from one of these many Easts—the “Wild East,” a pendant that stands pejoratively for the Balkans (Southeastern Europe), Central Europe, and the Soviet Union. These are all Others, whose discovery, as Neumann contends with respect to the Russian Other, is usually not treated equally with other liminal Others, like the Orient (67). Leaving a more extensive discussion to Chapter 2, I want to note simply here that the tropes of Eastern Europe and the Balkans have

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<sup>5</sup> German-Turkish citizens are the largest minority group in Germany today. It is justifiable that Turkish authors and their literary works occupy a central position in German and American studies in the “Other” literary tradition. Leslie Adelson, Petra Fachinger, Carmine Chiellino, and Arlene Akiko Teraoka’s studies of Turkish “minority literature” in Germany have not only highlighted the ongoing struggle over representations of the “Turk” but also questioned the status of contemporary German literature as traditionally German.

served, in the same vein as the Orient, as a repository of negative characteristics against which the West (Germany, England, etc.) constructed its positive, self-confirming image. Yet, if the Orient was antagonistically opposed to the West, this is not the case with the European East. It is an internal Otherness that is transitory as long as, to adopt the Freudian terminology, “there are other people left over to receive the manifestation of [a people’s] aggressiveness” (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 72). With respect to the Balkans, Balkanist scholar Maria Todorova considers this type of Otherness as “the lowermost case” or “incomplete self” of European identity (*Imagining the Balkans* 18), and political scientist Iver Neumann describes it with respect to Russia, as “the liminar case” of Europe (67). We will see in Chapter 2 that this intermediate position—between East and West, or more precisely, on the fringes within Europe—is visible in most 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century historical and literary accounts of the Balkans and Eastern Europe in Europe, in general, and in Germany, in particular.

As I demonstrate in the subsequent chapters on Dinev, Zacharieva, and Kaminer, this in-between marginality has survived today and is translated into the difficulty of categorizing writers from Eastern Europe and their works. It is a challenge that expresses itself in a double-coded exclusionary inclusion into the fields of mainstream and marginal writings. As Arens’ observation shows, literature produced by Eastern European migrants can be occasionally viewed within the parameters of the German literary canon, especially in situations where these writers are discussed in comparison with other minority writers such as the German-Turks. In this sense, the apparent acceptance of Eastern European migrant writers seems to confirm Freud’s comment about the binding principle between neighboring communities quoted above. Nonetheless, when discussed separately, Eastern European German-language works are more often than not viewed only as symptomatic of the postcolonial and migrant experiences and

further relegated to the margins of literary achievements (in a manner similar to that of Turkish-German writings). The results of such treatment are not only the narrow marketing niche within which such writers are to operate but also the simplification of the literary and critical potential of their narratives.

The issue that I see with such tendencies of exclusionary inclusion is both of a methodological and epistemological nature, for such tendencies perpetuate the ongoing historical and discursive marginality of Eastern European and Balkan Otherness as exemplified by the discourse on the EU as well as by the imbalanced state of academic knowledge about Second World cultures and traditions (such as the Soviet Union and its satellite states) in the Western academy. The latter is most evident in literary scholars' attempts to import and apply postcolonial theories as a singular reading paradigm to the cultural productions of the Eastern European and Balkan diaspora, a translation that is not without its problems because the theoretical framework assumes a different set of historical and cultural relations. While it is true that the Balkans were historically a part of Eastern empires (the Ottoman, the Habsburg, Tsarist Russia, and most lately, the Soviet) and subject to indirect Western domination, it is also true that their colonial experience differed significantly from those regions or parts of the world colonized by the West (i.e., African or Asian). None of the empires mentioned above strove to secure comparatively homogeneous populations, as was the case with the British, Spanish, and German Empires. Instead, they attempt to construct "hybrid notions of an empire-nation," by preserving its multicultural, multilingual, and multi-national character (Suny, "The Empire Strikes Out" 30). In this respect, the subjugated populations were not completely deprived of voice and enjoyed relative economic, religious, administrative, and cultural freedoms, which has allowed scholars to speak of a silenced yet not silent European East. Never truly colonized, the

Balkanites, in their strong sense of historicity, perceived each other as both colonizers and colonized “[who]celebrate[d] [their] medieval empire[s] and remember[ed] Ottoman slavery” (Dušan Bjelić, “Blowing Up the Bridge” 6). These sentiments are certainly far more complex than this abbreviated narrative allows, which I will expand in the next chapter of my dissertation. My point is that such ‘dual sensitivity’ ‘crowned’ with doubts about one’s ‘true Europeanness’ formed the core of Balkan subjectivity as partly European, partly Oriental.

With this Balkan specificity in mind, I would note that it is important to add in the context of Eastern European migration westwards that non-native German writers like the Czech Libuše Moníková, the Romanian Herta Müller, the Russian Wladimir Kaminer, the Bulgarian Dimitre Dinev, or the Bosnian Saša Stanišić, among others, do not exhibit the same type of historical and cultural intimacy with the Western host culture, which the Algerian francophone writer, Assja Djebar, displays in her narratives of violent colonial encounters, loss, and experiences of trauma. For these writers’ mastery of their literary language is not a matter of direct colonial imposition but one of personal choice and preference.

Taken together, these dissimilarities between Eastern European and other postcolonial cultures pose an important methodological question that has gone unanswered in the dominant discourse on literatures of migration. How are scholars to engage the literary production of Eastern European and Balkan migrant authors with terms and reading practices of postcolonial and Western theories without generalizing or essentializing historical experiences, cultures, places, and peoples? In many ways, Dinev, Zacharieva, and Kaminer’s texts bespeak obvious crosscultural and hybrid encounters, but they also cultivate, problematize, and rewrite dominant (i.e., institutionalized Western and postcolonial) and marginal (i.e., existing on the fringes of Western academic knowledge) discourses. In so doing, their tales invite us to traverse our own

mental maps and to further challenge disciplinary and geographical borders in search of a better fitted West-East lens through which to read these writers' work.

My broader aim in this project is therefore to position myself vis-à-vis the pertinent discourse on migrant literature in German. Exploring Balkan literature and identity in its own right and in relation to Germany, Austria, and Russia/USSR, I analyze the exposed lacunae of what appears to be at times, as Maria Todorova remarks, a similar with, and at other times dissimilar phenomenon from, the Orient: the Otherness of the Balkans and Eastern Europe (*Imagining the Balkans* 11). Other theoretical frameworks are also promising as the historical and academic discourse on Balkanism demonstrates. Consequently, my particular focus is on the possibilities of applying concepts advanced by postcolonial and western scholarship to this kind of diasporic literature, all the while drawing attention to Balkanism as an alternative paradigm to theories of alterity, hybridity, and subjectivity. The project thus offers a revision of the theory on migration and alterity; a line of investigation that has been primarily concerned with the Muslim Other as the legacy of Europe's first Other, but that cannot account for the ways in which "Other" empires in the Western imaginary, such as the Ottoman and the Soviet, have shaped Balkan identities and subjectivities throughout the centuries. The particular focus of such a theoretically-driven and cross-disciplinary approach is both to understand the complexities of hybrid forms and experiences inherent in these works and to explore how different forms of Otherness are historically constructed and how these variations of Otherness are played out along or across the East/West marker in the formation of European (trans)national identities and literatures today. As Neumann succinctly puts it with respect to the social sciences, the study of these dichotomies "hold[s] out the promise of a better understanding of who 'the actors' are, how they were constituted, how they maintain themselves, and under which preconditions they may



thrive” (37). This ultimately entails the question of “regaining subjectivity” as a form of agency that, when viewed within the context of literature, can further shed light on how literary renderings of Balkan experiential modalities of places, histories, migrations, and traumatic events become the prerequisite for recovering our ability of “living in difference” rather than the reason for “dying from otherness” (Neumann 27).

### **1.3 DISSERTATION CHAPTERS: OVERVIEW**

The following section provides a brief overview of the areas of inquiry related to this study. Chapter 2, “The Balkans: Europe’s Internal Other and the Question of Balkan Subjectivity” is conceived as a test case of the validity and relevance of Edward Said’s Orientalism (the dominant model of cultural alterity in Western discourse) in understanding the discursive constructions of Balkan and Eastern European identity. The chapter opens up with an examination of the current status of German scholarly work on 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century German-language migrant literature and highlights both the positive and more challenging developments associated with the critical engagement with the self/other and East/West binaries and questions of history, memory, language, and identity, as they appear in the prevalent literature of Turkish-German settlements. I noted at the outset that postcolonial concepts of hybridity, liminality, and performativity have provided a brace for the current literary-theoretical discourse on migration and alterity in the German academy. Cultural theorist Homi Bhabha’s work on hybridity is particularly interesting in this regard because it focuses on the ways in which the cultural practices of migrant, diasporic, and postcolonial communities today deconstruct the clear-cut boundaries set by the Saidian Western Orientalism. In so doing, they relativize the

representational dichotomies that created the differentness of the Orient as an antagonism sealed in race, skin color, religion, ethnicity, and cultural and economic development. My discussion thus recognizes the growing alignment between German Literary and Cultural Studies with postcolonial criticism, an alignment that provided literary scholars such as Hiltrud Arens, Azade Seyhan, Leslie Adelson, Venkat Mani, and others with the theoretical idiom to destabilize, using the example of German-Turkish writings, the long-held two-worlds myth/theory of interculturality and to revisit the cultural function of minority literary discourse in postwar Germany. But my recognition is also accompanied by sensitivity to these aspects of writing that such idiom of analysis has left intact as they pertain to migrant literature born in different historical, cultural, and religious settings such as the Balkans and Eastern Europe.

In the second half of Chapter 2, I turn, therefore, in a more sustained manner to the discourses on Balkanism and Eastern Europe as constructed by two pioneer works: Maria Todorova's *Imagining the Balkans* (1997) and Larry Wolff's *Inventing Eastern Europe* (1994). My interest in Balkanism is aimed at bringing into focus historical and academic knowledge that is marginal to the academic sectors of Western modernity. One aspect I take issue with is the subtle differentiations between the discursive constructions of Oriental and Balkan tropes of Otherness. My argument is that postcommunist Eastern Europe has remained, unlike the Muslim and African Orient, peripheral to Europe, and hence its strangeness and exoticism are still preserved. I have pointed out that the reasons for this peripheral marginality rest deeply on the broad geopolitical and historical narratives about the Orthodox Balkans and their cultural alterity; narratives that continue to inform the contemporary public and political discourses in almost all Balkan and in many Western countries. Consequently, the Balkans' internal Otherness raises questions about the scope and grasp of the different Balkan/Eastern European identity-

informing experiences within and across national contexts, differences that affirm the need for further examination and scrutiny of postcolonial and Western discourses in relation to the stories of the burdensome legacies of history, memory, and migration that the writings of those Balkanites like Dinev and Zacharieva who have made their way to “Europe” tell.

My discussion thus moves from: 1) an exploration of various theoretical concepts such as Todorova’s conception of the Balkans’ “lowermost” status and Milica Bakić-Hayden’s notion of “nesting Orientalisms” to; 2) an overview of Western and German literary and historical renderings of the area and its people as the “East within,” and; 3) an examination of the role of a century-old history of Eastern European/Balkan intellectual westward migration in the perpetual internalization of the Balkan trope as simultaneously “in” and “out” of Europe. Hence, I use from my discussion of Balkanism certain conceptual frameworks that are instrumental in rethinking both our understanding of the history of the Balkan discursive imaginary as Europe’s internal Other and the implication of this construct for current literary and cultural theories of migration. I draw attention to three further aspects that provide additional points of reference for interpretation: Erving Goffman’s study on stigma, Dominick LaCapra’s notion of trauma, and Julia Kristeva’s modern estrangements, particularly in relation to events in history, social exclusion, and migration. By synthesizing Goffman, LaCapra, and Kristeva’s theoretical insights and formulations, I broaden my conceptual framework for a critical reading of notions of alienation, memory, language, loss, trauma, and displacement recorded in the migrant literature under discussion, an examination that is continued in the next two chapters.

The following three chapters (3-5) represent the case studies of Dimitre Dinev, Rumjana Zacharieva, and Wladimir Kaminer and analyze the ways in which their works imagine particular kinds of (Balkan/Eastern European) subjectivity in order to create alternative forms of

identity and agency vis-à-vis the East/West dichotomy constructed in Western thought since Herder. Chapter 3, “Balkan Stories, Migrant Realities. Reconfiguring Southeastern European Identities under Global Conditions: The Case of Dimitre Dinev” analyzes three short stories, “Lazarus,” “Spas schläft” (“Spas Sleeps”), and “Die Inschrift” (“The Inscription”). They all thematize, in a mosaic-like fashion, the many factors that transform and create the Balkans (the rule of empires in the area; the struggle for self-identification; social exclusion; life under communism; and the everyday existence of the migrant) in order to create a full, yet emotionally burdened, picture of what the contradictory representations of the Balkans and the West entail. Each story by Dinev casts on the surface hybrid characters and liminal spaces, but also carries the message of marginal discourses like Balkanism. Set in communist Bulgaria, “Lazarus” is an ironic, sentimental tale that retells the turbulent life and peripeteia of the Bulgarian Roma and smuggler Lazarus by showing how the troubled Balkan imaginary impinges on the identity of his heroes and their discriminatory future in the West abroad. “Spas schläft” offers a further reworking of this theme. Told in a series of dream flashbacks, the tale recapitulates Spas and Ilija’s migrancy in Vienna as an instance of economic survival and an identity quest carried out at the crossroads of legality and illegality, countries and law, and languages and cultures. It is within the shifting dimensions of these pairings that hybridity reemerges, not as the fusion of mutually and mutably transforming experiences, fragments, and differences, but as the configuration of successive East/West binaries that stigmatize the Balkan subject as trapped within the Balkanist discursive geography, problematizing the horizontal/hierarchical antagonism between an enlightened center and an orientalized (i.e., dependend or backward) periphery, European universalism and Balkan subordinism. With “Die Inschrift,” a story about human vulnerability, disintegration, love, and perseverance in times of violence and repression,

the chapter closes its discussion about the enduring legacy of empires (e.g., the Ottoman) that continue to influence the traumatic search for a stable Balkan/Bulgarian identity across and beyond the confines of the nation.

Chapter 4, “Exilic Voices or the Aporia of Shifting Identities: The Case of Rumjana Zacharieva” offers a discussion of Rumjana Zacharieva’s semi-autobiographical novel *Bärenfell* (*Bear Skin* 1999). Like Dimitre Dinev’s works, Zacharieva’s narrative likewise focuses on history and tradition, politics and exclusion, foreignness and language shifts in negotiating subjectivity as the focal point of East/West cultural clashes. Dinev interweaves centuries of imperial and modern Balkan history in his stories in order to complete the mosaic of various competing, contradicting, and self-transforming identity models engendered under the auspices of Orientalist, Balkanist, and Western representational discourses. Similarly, Zacharieva’s alienated female character Mila takes the reader into the maze of the past and present experiences of a Bulgarian female migrant and writer in Germany as she tries to recover on a trip to her home country Bulgaria a sense of an ethnic and national identity against the common inscriptions of her self into Orientalist, Balkanist, gendered, and migration paradigms by both Germans and Bulgarians alike. At first glance, the character’s internal split in cultural identity and destiny echoes other expatriated intellectuals’ unsettled relationships with their Balkan origins and identity. Yet, this does not hold true for Zacharieva. I show how the exilic voice of Zacharieva’s heroine finds instead, in Julia Kristeva’s fashion, linguistic and historical coordinates that cross the spaces of memory and time to connect, however painfully, with the stranger in herself. Mila’s tale represents (an)other story of her country’s history as a narrative burdened by communist state rhetoric and doctrine, a story of the “Balkans’ havoc” as the core of European identity (Bjelić, “The Balkans’ Imaginary” 10). Though different in terms of style

and genre, Dinev and Zacharieva's works represent in complimentary ways the discursive production of selfhood as fashioned in the Orthodox Balkans, as the interlinkage of personal experiences, historical and political processes, and modern estrangements. Zacharieva's *Bärenfell* turns into a metaphor of the "neither" of the Balkan female's migrant subjectivity as one shaped not in an opposition against preestablished concepts and dichotomies of identities but in the aporia of shifting modes of identification with power, language, ethnicity, and nation in both the Balkans and the West (Milevska, "Balkan Subjectivity as 'Neither'" 187).

Chapter 5, "Reaching for a Common Ground: Wladimir Kaminer and the New Portraits of Imagined Communities" continues my critical interrogation into the ways in which contemporary Eastern European migrant authors residing in Germany and writing in German participate in rethinking existing discourses on identity, alterity, minority, and migration. At the center of this chapter is the Russo-German writer Wladimir Kaminer, who in the last ten years has earned fame on the German and international literary-cultural scene as an emblematic figure of Berlin's Russian diaspora. Situated in the "now" of Germany's *Erlebnisgesellschaft* (event culture) and as a part of it, Kaminer's short story cycles *Russendisko* (*Russian Disco* 2000), *Die Reise nach Trulala* (*Travel to Trulala* 2002), and *Mein deutsches Jungelbuch* (*My German Jungle Book* 2003) reflect, in a very relaxed manner, the works' transnational, globalized, and multiethnic complexities. Critics have celebrated Kaminer as a purveyor of hybrid, performative identities and crossed spaces, thereby bypassing the link between the historical and cultural imaginaries and material realities from which Kaminer's texts originate and on which they draw, a connection that the chapter aims to restore.

Being the heir to the communists' socialist legacy but also to ancient and multiethnic cultures, Russia, like the Balkans, has been the target of Western European othering practices

that have constructed the country as “an ambiguous presence on Europe’s border,” half-Asiatic and half-European, half-despotic and half-civilized (Neumann 110). Unlike the alterity of the Balkans, however, Russia’s (and by extension the Soviet Union’s) alterity was not rooted in invisibility but in the country’s increased visibility as a historically, culturally, and politically strong imperial and colonial power. This alterity further translates into the discursive creation of peculiar Russian self-representations that underscore Russian exceptionalism and specificity and position the country along the same lines of European development and subjectivity (i.e., potentially equal or even superior to the West). Attending to the Russian discourse on Europe and on itself, the chapter shows how Western and Russian imaginaries on Europe and the Other reverberate in Kaminer’s narrative constructions of the lived tension of multicentered cosmopolitan spaces and hyphenated identities, all reterritorialized formations in which Russian, German, and European symbolic topographies are deconstructed and reimagined across and beyond the frontiers of nations, experiences, cultures, and traditions.

In addition, every chapter analyses situations in which the experience of migration from East to West is negotiated and problematized. As with many other migrant writers, Dinev, Zacharieva, and Kaminer’s migrant experiences in the West are preconditioned not only by the writers’ place and culture of origin but also by the reasons for immigration and the social and economic conditions in the host country with which these writers are confronted. My discussion of the authors’ personal backgrounds and their positioning vis-à-vis the current literary-cultural minority discourse suggests an enhanced appreciation of the way in which their literature reflects the difference in the writers’ migration experience as well as reactions to the current images of migrants and hosts. In a comparative and dialogical fashion, I further explore in each chapter the stylistic and discursive strategies the authors apply in their texts in order to inscribe cultural

difference, to reinforce and/or destabilize cultural stereotypes, and to create different, yet mutually qualifying, representations of cultural and national belongings, memory narratives, and identities.

Inherent to this dialogical mode of writing is also my use of terms such as exilic, diasporic, migrant, and transnational. A survey of the various critical essays, books, and theoretical research conducted in both Germany and the United States, as well as of the published numerous anthologies, demonstrates the difficulty underlying the search for a unified definition of this type of literature since its earliest phases. The initial attempt by German scholars in the 1980s to homogenize and totalize the otherwise heterogeneous texts of migrant authors as “Gastarbeiterliteratur” (“guest workers’ literature”) became outmoded in the early 1990s, when it proved incapable of characterizing the works of authors, who neither came as guest workers, as in the case of Libuše Moníková (Czech Republic), Herta Müller (Romania), and Rumjana Zacharieva (Bulgaria), nor were old enough, like Feridun Zaimoğlu (Turkey), to participate in the recruitment of guest workers. In addition, other categorizations were developed—“Ausländerliteratur” (“foreigners’ literature,” Ackermann 1986), “Minoritätenliteratur” (“minority literature,” Arens 2000), and “andere deutsche Literatur” (“another German literature,” Trojanow 2000). And they all, along with the concept “Immigrantenliteratur” (“immigrant literature”) and descriptions such as “ethnic,” “exilic,” “diasporic,” and “migrant,” were further opposed by critics and writers alike on the basis of the insufficiency of these terms to justify “the nuances of writings between histories, geographies, and cultural practices” (Seyhan, *Writing Outside the Nation* 9). The difficulty originates in a number of factors such as: 1) the diverse socio-political, historical, and ethnic backgrounds of the



authors; 2) the generational differences informing the history of the new literary tradition; and 3) the wide range of themes with which this type of literature deals.<sup>6</sup>

Hence, this project does not seek a singular definition of this type of literature, although I use the concept of “migrant literature”<sup>7</sup> to single out Dinev, Zacharieva, and Kaminer’s works within the parameters of the local and the national and to indicate the voluntary nature of their living abroad. I do so in order to acknowledge the uniqueness and importance of this type of writing in rewriting the parameters of the German nation by those who had been left on the margins, in this case the migrants from Eastern Europe and the Balkans. In each instance, however, I use the terms *émigré*, *expatriate*, *diaspora*, and *exile* interchangeably to accentuate the different degrees of interconnectedness as well as to highlight differences that exist between the writings and their authors. All these writers have undergone a significant cultural, linguistic, and geographical identity shift, but their experience abroad and worldviews do not let themselves be encapsulated in one term or single label. And if I choose the notion of exile and the *exilic* to refer to the metaphoric and internal separation and intellectual alienation of Zacharieva’s heroine, my deployment of *diaspora* in Kaminer and Dinev’s cases is rather triggered by the sociological associations and tensions that their diverse characters relive in their day-to-day situations, which

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<sup>6</sup> Themes vary from issues such as the experience of migration and exile, biculturalism and bilingualism, the meeting of cultures, acculturation and integration to reaffirmation and renegotiation of individuality and the recognition of an urgent need for dialogue between dominant and marginal cultures. In addition, many works do not constrain themselves to life in the host country but also engage the political and social aspects and past history of the country of origin; hence, the revitalization of autobiography as a preferred generic form in the third phase.

<sup>7</sup> As a historical phenomenon, migration encompasses more than work migration or system migration. Because of its socio-political and even global character, migration means the mobility not only of people but also of money, consumer goods, information, and ideas. Migration signifies, therefore, not simply migration between different countries but also migration between cultures, systems, religions, times, and continents (Rösch 3). The touchstone is the cultural interaction arising from a particular historical situation.

are affected by the memories of entangled global histories, divisions, and conflicts within and across nations, cultures, and pasts. Finally, viewed within the context of global migration as a historical and sociopolitical phenomenon, the literature produced by Dinev, Kaminer, and Zacharieva is a part of a phenomenon encompassing a wide range of differences, points of reference, and identities that are negotiated within, across, and beyond their historical, social, political, national, and cultural specificities. As such, their fiction partakes of a transnational literary discourse and should therefore be studied comparatively along with major names of bilingual and bicultural background such as V. S. Naipaul, Assja Djebbar, Salman Rushdie, Milan Kundera, Samuel Beckett, and many others.

This last point takes me to the afterword of this dissertation. “Towards a ‘Vital Parliament’ of Disciplines and Cultures” considers the theoretical, epistemological, cultural, and pedagogical gains of a critical analysis of the writings of Balkan and Eastern European diasporic authors. With respect to the perspective I develop in this project, the value of the Balkanist and Eastern European discourses of Otherness is what provides a refined, cross-disciplinary and theoretically-driven approach in relation to our understanding of the complex signifying systems of historical ideas, social practices, and aesthetic codes inherent in these narratives, on the one hand, and in the fields of literary criticism, cultural studies, and the social sciences, on the other. As a part of the newly emerging transnational literature, Dinev, Zacharieva, and Kaminer’s texts not only offer a glimpse into the cultural debris of Balkanhood, Europeanness, and Germanness but also chart their own version of the crossroads at which identities may be reconfigured into “a vital parliament” of European cultures (Bjelić, “Blowing Up the ‘Bridge’” 19). From this angle, the afterword raises other questions that relate to perspectives associated with different phenomena connected with the cultural practices of Eastern European/Balkan diaspora and also

discusses possible further avenues of research and teaching that emerge out of an interdisciplinary approach to Eastern European/Balkan migrant writings in German.

## 2.0 THE BALKANS: EUROPE'S INTERNAL OTHER AND THE QUESTION OF BALKAN SUBJECTIVITY

“They want to be gentlemen. They think they are fancy Europeans.

I'll tell you something. We're all just Balkan shit!”

(qtd. in Michael Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honor. Ethnic War and the Modern Consciousness*. 33)

The use of the trope “Balkan” by a Serbian soldier in this story epitomizes a two-fold dilemma: 1) the Western inscription of the Balkans into Orientalist paradigms, and; 2) the Balkanites’ internalization of this inscription as the articulation of the trope’s representational power. Given the fixed and limited lens through which Western scholars currently view problems of Balkanist representation, Balkan scholars such as Maria Todorova and Dušan Bjelić have shown that the persistence of the trope “Balkan” requires a rigorous analysis via a cross-disciplinary approach.

In this chapter, I explore the evolution of the trope of Otherness as it has developed historically and in academic discourses in the West and beyond. This investigation entails a great deal of consideration in the broader field of literary and cultural theory. Part 1 of this chapter, “Hybrid Sites and Liminal Spaces: The German Story” begins with a continuation of the previous chapter’s discussion by offering a more detailed overview of the critical attempts of literary scholars in German studies to rethink and reconceptualize perceived binaries (e.g., West/East, self/other, power/domination, and/or center/periphery) regarding the questions, themes, and strategies endorsed by contemporary non-native authors in their German-language

fiction since the 1980s. As I demonstrate in this first section, the existing theoretical models developed either in terms of post-World War II immigration to West Germany or in terms of colonial/postcolonial paradigms have only limited applicability for our analysis of the Balkan trope in literature produced by Balkan intellectual émigrés writing in German.

In purely historical, political, and societal terms, the experiences of Balkan and Eastern European migrants in the West do not share the same characteristics with those of postcolonial migrants and should thus not be conflated with them. I argue in this respect that hybridity and liminality—key words in postcolonial and Balkan studies, though differently laden—could provide to a certain extent fruitful points of intersection between postcolonial theory and Balkan and German realities as well as a theoretical vantage point for contemplating Balkan migrant writing. The questions, nevertheless, remain. To what extent can we speak of hybridity and liminality, concepts advanced by cultural theorists such as Homi Bhabha, as useful and ideologically empowering authoritative categories for Balkan and Eastern European migrant writers, whose liminal condition is already doubled by their countries' liminal status? Bulgaria, for instance, is in limbo in terms of its geographical position (on the edge of Europe and at the gates of the Orient), civilizational makeup (currently caught in a state between the remnants of a failed socialist regime and the beginning of unfettered capitalism), and historical role (almost always relegated to a semi-colonial political and economic dependency). And historically, the Soviet Empire's position as culturally distant from and close to Europe, yet politically a strong imperial neighbor, has also contributed to the country's perception and self-perception as Asiatic, quasi Oriental rather than Caucasian and Western. Hence, the goal of this chapter, "The Balkans: Europe's Internal Other and the Question of Balkan Subjectivity," is not only to engage existing theoretical paradigms developed in migration and postcolonial studies with such issues but also

to provide a more refined historical, theoretical, and conceptual framework for the study of Eastern European/Balkan migration literature. As I further set out to show in the following pages, an examination of the theoretical discussion of the concept of Balkanism promises to offer a new approach in research on migration and alterity for German Studies and other national cultures that are still largely focused on Muslim immigrants as the Other.

Part 2, “Symbolic Maps of Europe: The Balkans as the East Within,” thus charts out Western perceptions and representations of the Balkans and Eastern Europe as Europe’s internal Other (Todorova) through an analysis of the arguments advanced by major Balkanist scholars such as Maria Todorova, Larry Wolff, Milica Bakić-Hayden, and others. In influential works like *Inventing Eastern Europe* (1994), “Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia” (1995), and *Imagining the Balkans* (1997), Wolff, Bakić-Hayden, and Todorova have laid the theoretical-critical foundation to discuss Balkanism by considering the Balkans’ geo-political significance, religious composition, and imperial experience and to revisit commonly accepted views about the peninsula and its people as the ‘rest’ and the ‘residue’ of Europe. In addition, these theorists have acknowledged the significance of Balkanist discourse for the internal bipolarization and imagination of Europe by drawing attention to the ways in which Balkan peoples have internalized Western paradigms of Balkan othering as semi-colonial, partly European and partly Oriental. Furthermore, an inquiry into the notion of the Balkans and Eastern Europe as particular imperial legacies (e.g., Ottoman colonialism or socialist imperialism) can, in turn, provide us with additional conceptual tools for historicizing recent debates concerned with the formation of Balkan and Eastern European identities beyond and across defined national parameters. Such a historically oriented approach is a key element in this project as it provides a basis for examining how reemergent cultural and historical imaginaries in Dimitre Dinev and

Rumjana Zacharieva's German-language texts breathe life into and uncover other potential (hi)stories, imperial tropes, feelings of belonging and displacement in the negotiation of Balkan subjectivity within and across the parameters of transnational writings in German.

Part 3 builds on the second part's historically contextualized approach. "Balkan Self-Images—Then and Now. The Immigrants of the Balkans in the Midst of Western Europe and Where They Stood and Stand" was inspired by the realization that the East and the West of Europe not only share a common present and a vision of a future unity, but also a common past in whose labyrinths processes of intra-European migration had played no less a significant role for the crosscultural exchange between the two parts of the Old Continent as well as for the internalization and perpetuation of Western constructions of Balkan Otherness at home and abroad. A brief survey of the little known and discussed sociocultural profile of Eastern European/Balkan intellectual migration westwards from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards illustrates how former Balkan intellectual émigrés viewed themselves and their countries and what their ideas about Europe, the Balkans, and the world were. I argue that Balkan intellectuals, educated in major Western European metropolitan cities, became the originators of the turn-of-the-century Balkan political, educational, and cultural elite. As such, these intellectuals would not only become the main promoters of Western political and cultural ideas in the newly formed Balkan nation-states but also the most important opponents of the uncritical and mechanistic appropriation of Western values and norms by the emerging native bourgeois classes. Seen from this perspective, migration movements thus involved not only the transfer of people across borders but also of worldviews and experiences that penetrated the country's social fabric and were further transmitted across generations, social classes, and time periods. Consequently, I view the migrant intellectual writers I examine as the never anticipated offspring who inherited

and appropriated a great deal of Western humanistic traditions and now reproduce them in a new context and form. This part of chapter 2 will thus supply us with the link to the historical irregularity of intellectual migration from East to West. Addressing the particularities that inform the historico-cultural development of Balkan intellectual migration westwards further offers us a deeper understanding of how intellectual migrants today engage the complex link between cultural identities and affective ties to countries, places, languages, and people and what all this has to do with the external and internal factors that have led to less-than-positive (self) labeling of the Balkan region and its inhabitants.

The cultural legacy of Eastern European and Balkan diaspora, as it will become evident, is indeed a convoluted issue and poses a problem that requires us to conduct a more extended treatment of certain models and paradigms and of other experiences so that we are able, in the end, to inquire into the complex nature of emerging transnational identities of the so-called “new Europeans.” With respect to transnational writings, it is advisable to recall Azade Seyhan’s words that “[a] new critical inquiry has to move beyond the deterritorialized foreignness of the text. We need to read and understand other literary traditions in their diachronic and synchronic contexts, that is, in terms of both their historical development and conceptual foundations” (*Writing Outside the Nation* 29). The response to this task is, of course, not so apparent or straightforward, and it certainly does not presuppose any clear-cut disciplinary terrains from within which such study is to operate. And this is how the present chapter is to be conceived: namely, as an example of such cross-disciplinary exercise that engages in critical and self-critical interaction with historical and theoretical initiatives as the necessary means for gaining a deeper perspective into the cultural and political fabric of texts produced across and thus beyond national literary canons.



The concluding section in this chapter, “Bridging the Gap: East and West in Theory and Practice,” engages, therefore, in a brief discussion of the possibilities that applying theoretical assumptions of Western thought to the works of Wladimir Kaminer, Dimitre Dinev, and Rumjana Zacharieva yield while remaining sensitive to the specific context from which these works originate. Part 4 seeks to reestablish the connection between particular geopolitical contexts, historical realities, and theoretical gains from both West and East. In a sense, Kaminer, Dinev, and Zacharieva are writers whose German-language literature production stands at the wake of diasporic avant-garde writings that not only thematize issues typical of the experience of migration but also demonstrate the intellectual need and humanistic responsibility to retrieve and nourish social formations and cultural practices within their historical dimensions and current location. As postcolonial theories show, such a move involves a program of migrant aesthetics that is grounded in heterogeneity and multiple displacements, be these cultural, linguistic, ethnic, or social. All three writers center thus on fluid identities and manifold loyalties and refuse to take a side in favor of one identity over the other, of one geographical and cultural space or the other. The strength of their literary craftsmanship lies, as my analysis will demonstrate, in the ability to capture in their narratives: 1) a range of (historical, cultural, and ideological) links that are latent in the construction of Eastern European/Balkan contested identities, and; 2) life and cultural experiences that are not always so easily integrated and celebrated despite the presence of even more and more porous boundaries. The latter point is best visible in Dinev and Zacharieva who, in their attempt to negotiate diverse and multiple selves beyond existent dichotomies, shift the focus back and forth from the Balkan geographical space to that of Germany and Austria, thereby bringing to life oppositions (barbarity vs. civilization, East vs. West, Balkan vs. European, Bulgarian vs. European, exclusion vs. inclusion, center vs. periphery) whose moments

are historically anchored and traumatically shaped. Dinev inscribes these moments in the material conditions of historical and social realities of migration and imperial oppression thematized in his short stories. And for Zacharieva, they are to be found in the various forms of (self)estrangement that her autobiographically inflected fictional migrant self undergoes. My final remarks thus concern the representation of trauma and modern estrangements as discussed in works by Dominick LaCapra and Julia Kristeva, formulations that will serve as further stepping stones in my textual investigation of Balkan diasporic literature's dialectical and dynamic escapes from the precursor paradigms and discourses of minor literatures into the broader fields of history, memory, language, and identity.

## **2.1 HYBRID SITES AND LIMINAL SPACES: THE GERMAN STORY**

For almost two decades now, Homi Bhabha's powerful critique of holistic and essentialist readings of nationhood and culture in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994) has been paving the way for a number of critical readings in both postcolonial and migrant contexts, in which hybridity, liminality, and the interstice are cleansed of their negative and debilitating connotations and revalorized as privileged spaces of cultural renewal and regeneration. As Nikos Papastergiadis remarks, the heightened preoccupation with hybridity in academic circles can be explained with the fact that hybridity, in its various associations—the marginal, the contradictory, the mobile, and the ambiguous—presupposes identity as a constant process of negotiation of differences (“Tracing Hybridity in Theory” 258). Such negotiation of differences opens up gaps and fissures, fault lines and cracks that do not necessarily signify failures in

agency and identity, but mark the multiple intersections between power discourses, ethnicity, race, and nation and yield possibilities for resistance. In Bhabha's understanding, hybridity goes beyond the ultimate joining or final accumulation (i.e., an ordered fusion) of experiences, forms, and practices to come closer to the concept of pertinent flux and change that underlies Heraclitus's rationalism, further found in Heidegger's or Derrida's philosophical treatises. 'No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man,' we recall Heraclitus's famous phrase. Of course, Bhabha's vocabulary differs from that of the Greek philosopher. What he has in common, nonetheless, with Heraclitus is the recognition of the impossibility of a stable unitary subject, but of a subject, who, in Bhabha's words is "formed 'in-between,' or in excess of, the sum of the I parts' of difference" (*The Location of Culture* 2). Crucial in this respect for Bhabha is the interstitial moment, the space in between realities, where values, meanings, and priorities enter a process of sometimes mutual, sometimes contradictory transformations and reevaluations. Bhabha calls this liminal place "a Third Space of enunciation," from where one can stand and act critically in response to different dominant ideologies, political or social structures (35).

Originally created to tackle the specificities of colonial and postcolonial conditions, Bhabha's ideas expand to encompass the margins of diaspora and the multiplicity of cultural forms and performances that make up the current face of global, transnational, and/or migrant communities. In this regard, his concept of the "liminal" negotiations of cultural identities across differences of race, class, gender, and cultural traditions have found great resonance with various scholars in *Interkulturelle Germanistik* and *German Cultural Studies*, theorists who have sought an alternative to the conceptual and practical dilemmas that German encounters with the Turkish Other engendered in academic and public discourses in the late 1980s and early 1990s in

Germany. In an essay entitled “More Than a Metaphor: The Passing of the Two Worlds Paradigm in German-Language Diasporic Literature” from 2006, Jim Jordan summarizes, for instance, how Turkish-German literature produced in the period between the late 1970s until the early 1990s was primarily viewed by scholars from *Interkulturelle Germanistik* against the backdrop of the wide-spread view of the so-called “Zerrissenheit zwischen zwei Kulturen” (Arens, *Kulturelle Hybridität* 13),<sup>8</sup> or what he terms the “two worlds paradigm.” According to Jordan, this paradigm became “the literary correlate of models of multiculturalism developed during the 1980s and early 1990s” in Germany and was mostly based on the model of essential and fixed entities (488). During this period the polarization in public debates about issues of integration, host versus migrant communities, and the role of the intellectual in multiethnic societies reached its peak.<sup>9</sup> He argues that migrant authors are, in general, always attuned to changes in the society they live in and adopt the “two worlds paradigm” and the metaphors associated with it (e.g., bridges, doors, birds, and planets) as a powerful literary tool to characterize “the position and role of their writing” (490). Zafer Şenocak’s “Gedicht XIV” from

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<sup>8</sup> In the 1970s, the appeal for integration/ assimilation into the dominant German culture led to a further marginalization and an increasing number of psychopathological disturbances on the part of the foreigners working and living in the BRD (Arens 13-14). This was due to the paradox inherent in German integration politics according to which “ArbeitsmigrantInnen” (“labor migrants”) were to be seen neither as “FremdarbeiterInnen” (“foreign workers”) nor as “EinwanderInnen” (immigrants”) (Arens 13). For a more detailed discussion about the socio-historical context of immigration and Germany, Arens 5-29.

<sup>9</sup> In the 1980s, two opposing tendencies took place on Germany’s political and social scene. Leftist organizations and institutions spoke for an acceptance of cultural diversity that was met with an increased rejection of everything that is different on the part of political reactionary and conservative groups. Indeed, rightwing fractions saw in the presence of so many foreigners in Germany a threat for the homogeneity and supremacy of the German nation and scapegoated immigrants for the weakening of the German economic nation-state. This ultimately led to a series of violent attacks on foreigners, culminating in the murders of eight Turkish women and children in Mölln (1992) and Solingen (1993). For further references, see Adelson 1994, 2005; Arens 2000, and Jordan 2006.

*Verkauf der Morgenstimmungen am Markt* (1983) and Alev Tekinay's early poem "Dazwischen" from *Zwischen zwei Giganten* (1985) thus articulate the experience of migration as a state in between cultures and worlds, an experience that was further forged by the current multicultural debates.<sup>10</sup> Concerning this, what needs to be underscored is that migrant authors appropriated the "two worlds paradigm" as a means to make "sense of themselves and the world" (Jordan 490). The employment of the paradigm eventually led to its misappropriation in the works' critical reception as an "authentic," and therefore, "an enduring characterization of diasporic writing as an activity that takes place between cultures" (490). It was not until the mid 1990s that the "two worlds paradigm" lost credibility through the introduction of theories of cultural hybridity and performativity into contemporary German Studies.

In a series of essays and books, prominent scholars from German Cultural Studies in the U.S., such as Arlene A. Teraoka, Leslie Adelson, Azade Seyhan, and others, have sought a methodological way to bridge the gap between *Interkulturelle Germanistik*<sup>11</sup> and a "multiculturally oriented German Studies," finding in Homi Bhabha's ideas a fresh start for revisiting German-language diasporic texts not as "discrete cultural artifacts but as open-ended discursive processes infused with sociality" (Adelson, "Opposing Oppositions" 306). The

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<sup>10</sup> In light of the increasing negative public opinion toward eastern immigrants and problems of integration, the multicultural project was inevitably doomed to fail because multiculturalism itself depended on fixed notions of 'self' and 'other' and clearly defined ethnic groups whose distinguishing marker was that of ethnicity under which all other markers such as gender, class relations, or religion were to be subsumed. This finally entailed that in order to achieve a socially cohesive society, or, in other words, "a genuine melting pot," subaltern cultures had to assimilate to the *Leitkultur* (Jordan 493).

<sup>11</sup> The discipline *Interkulturelle Germanistik* emerged in Germany in the mid 1980s and its development was to a great extent influenced by the public multicultural debates at the time. Compared to German Cultural Studies, intercultural Germanistik was less dynamic because it adopted the model of "stable notions of national cultures," according to which the Germanist saw him/herself as "a bridge between cultures" (Jordan 494).

following quote exemplifies Leslie Adelson's summary of the conceptual inefficacy of *Interkulturelle Germanistik*:

By stressing the *communicability* of difference and perpetuating a model that seeks to teach "them" how to understand "us," *interkulturelle Germanistik* feigns interest in literary text and cultural context but effectively privileges authors and reader as fixed poles in a supposed exchange of meaning. This leaves it helpless to account for the various ways in which culture is propelled by the ongoing production and displacement of unstable differences. Nor can it account for the historical-political functions to which such slippage attains. (306)

What this quote points to is the absent theoretical strategy of *Interkulturelle Germanistik* to address questions of power and cultural representation. It also alerts to the Germanisten dismissal of the fact that the "conversational paradigm" was only possible when the dialectical relationship between "culture[s] as lived identit[ies]," that is to say, the way in which cultural positions are produced and sustained or challenged, is taken into consideration. Henceforth, Adelson promotes an interdisciplinary cultural approach as "a permanent border action" (306).

In her discussions that focus primarily on Turkish-German relationships, Adelson subscribes to Homi Bhabha's ideas that the production of modern national identities is unthinkable without the production of cultural marginalities and adopts his notion of "cultural difference" as indicative of "the production of marginal positions [as a production that] does not reinforce the supposedly fixed identity of a self so much as it reveals the fundamental *ambivalence* of identity" (307). Adelson's book *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature* (2005) is one such validation of the particular ethnic aspect of Turkish-German liminality in favor of a broader, more probing exploration of the issues of politics of power and

representation in forging identities as seen in the literary production of Turks and Germans. A forerunner, Hiltrud Arens's book *Kulturelle Hybridität in der deutschen Minoritätenliteratur der achtziger Jahre* (2000) also takes on the dialectical interplay between ambiguity, hybridity, structure, and agency stressing the need for reconsidering the "two worlds paradigm" as insufficient in accounting for the dynamic structure of social identities and "cultures of migrations as *historical formations*" (Adelson, *The Turkish Turn* 4). What all these authors have in common is the belief that a heightened awareness of the larger structures that enable and restrain one's agency could potentially create Bhabha's "Third Space of enunciation" where creative resistance and transformative struggles can be performed. In the spirit of these debates then, German-language migrant literature, as a part of the socio-political processes and changes in Germany, has been understood as the production of Deleuze and Guattari's politicized minorities that are, to adopt Jim Jordan's words, "positioned within matrices of gender, generation, class, ethnicity and nationality which themselves are in flux, and subject to changes of historical perspectives, international political realignments and different rates of modernization" (491).

While Homi Bhabha's theory has attracted multiple reappropriations, reevaluations, and reconsiderations of the notions of alterity and the Other in the disciplinary fields of migrant and literary cultural studies, it has also been the subject of criticism among postcolonial theorists who have pointed to the fault lines in the practicality of Bhabha's argumentation and the reductionism of his critical style. Thus, for instance, scholars specializing in subaltern studies have accentuated Bhabha's propensity to overgeneralize his political agenda of colonial subjectivity against an understatement of the material conditions of colonial experience. Influential in this aspect has been an essay published by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak a few years before Bhabha's book

appeared in print. Entitled “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak’s article elaborates on the thorny issue of the translatability of a culture whose historical past and memory have been so traumatized and compromised by the colonial experience that a dialogue across the Third and First World intellectual divide seems to be hardly possible. Acknowledging the heterogeneity of India’s population and putting the Indian landless poor and rural women in the center of her discussion, Spivak insists on the impossibility of finding conceptual terms through which intellectuals could translate this type of historical experience into Western categories that would do justice to the subaltern without falling into the trap of Western benevolence or solidarity with the oppressed. She, therefore, circumvents any positive grammar of representation by historians or “organic intellectuals,” in whose acts of speaking for the subaltern, she sees, through Derridian lenses, “the danger of appropriating the other through assimilation” (104). At the end of her essay, Spivak concludes that, indeed, “[t]he subaltern cannot speak” and what matters then are those moments of silence and disarticulation as indices of the subaltern condition (104). Spivak thus implicitly rewrites the notion of hybridity (whose partial and distorted representation Bhabha valorizes in his theory of agency as the interpretative mode for experiences and histories deemed unworthy of representation) into a sole metaphor for the construction of hyphenated identities.

As I have already mentioned, Bhabha’s attention to hybridity and liminality as a means of interpreting the various forms of cultural survival adopted by migrant, diasporic, and postcolonial communities in times of global economic, social, geographical, and political restructurings has not only breathed fresh air into debates concerned with the destabilization of essentialist and reductionist paradigms. It has also, as every controversial avant-garde theory, contributed to addressing other pressing, yet less than obvious, issues. Regarding the latter,



Bhabha has also been criticized for his instrumentalization of fictional texts for the sake of theoretical enunciations, a methodological move that literary critics, in their desire to produce cross-disciplinary readings of texts, are sometimes not spared of committing either.<sup>12</sup> In her book *Writing Outside the Nation*, Azade Seyhan remarks in this context:

The idea of hybridity as a constant of all modes of cultural expression and as the third space that enables the emergence of multiple positions, for example, forgoes an analysis of actual social space where cultures interact and literature as an institution of cultural memory intervenes. Similarly, the highly productive investigation of textual constructions and cultural affiliations that shape the notion of nation and the transformation of the losses incurred in displacement and migration “into the language of metaphor” calls for a more nuanced historical understanding of literary texts. (5)

The quote addresses at least two methodological caveats that a literary critic should consider in his or her critical analysis. Following Adrian Otoiu’s discussion of postcommunist Romanian prose, it is first the realization that, as is the case with the application of cultural theories such as Bhabha’s, for example, one needs to reach beyond the parameters marked by such conceptual terms like the interstice, the limen, or hybridity in order to explore more fully the repertoire of liminalities that flicker in the matrix of textual representations (“An Exercise in Fictional Liminality” 96). As Otoiu insightfully puts it, such approaches compel one to discuss literary texts as if they were “a wholly transparent window onto physical reality; or faithful mirror, an unambiguous piece of evidence” of reality itself; that is, in a manner similar to the ways in which

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<sup>12</sup> For a more detailed discussion on this tendency with respect to the critical assessment of the themes and literary values of German migrant fictional narratives, see Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

discussions about our physical reality evolve: around the axes of anthropology, sociology, politics, and ideological claims (96). What remains outside the scope of scholarly analysis, to elaborate further on Otoi's statement, is the aesthetic value of the constructed/mediated nature of literature (i.e., of the multiplicity of narrative forms and strategies) to (de)construct meaning, and to convey experiences and worldviews through the aesthetic shaping of the relation between word and world (96).

In the field of German literary criticism, scholars have made similar claims about the limited applicability of Homi Bhabha's concepts to migrant texts and contexts. Mentionable in that regard are again the names of Azade Seyhan, Leslie Adelson, and Venkat Mani, among others. To reiterate, while they all share with Bhabha the view of the potential of the diasporic and the hybrid to transcend essentializing locations or paradigms that characterize literatures, nations, people, and identities, each one of them has furthered his or her research into the broader conceptual understanding of the ways in which literature per se, as textual representation, has had critical symbolic or material effect on the reimaginings and productions of multi-vocal and multi-focal subjectivities, transnationalisms, and spaces. For Seyhan, such inquiry into the textual wor(l)ds of Turkish-German and Chicano writers has meant an investigation in "translation, semiotics, cultural memory, island and borderland cultures, traveling cultures, and ethnographic allegory" (*Writing Outside the Nation* 29). And for Mani, it is the semiotics of cosmopolitanism that has served him well as a critical reading lens in his exploration of how texts from Nadolny to Pamuk have utilized certain figurative tropes and strategies for thematizing displacement, dislocation, and divided loyalties.

As with Turkish-German writings, the fiction produced by writers from the Balkans delineates affected worlds in which, to adopt Leslie Adelson's words, "the touch of historical

narratives and the configuration of cultural alterity are readily felt, if poorly grasped” (“Touching Tales” 100).<sup>13</sup> These are narrative worlds of internal and external others, worlds in which references are made to international and national histories, world ideologies, communist, Ottoman, and Nazi pasts, Balkan attitudes and views about Germany and Western Europe, fears of migration, exclusion, and domination. Using works by Nadolny, Özdamar, Zaimoglu, Şenocak, and Ören, Adelson conceptualizes such subtle references as “the riddle of referentiality” that “conjoins the practice of historical reference and that of figural reference in the literary sense;” two practices that touch to inform a narrative, a “tale” in which various acts of remembrance are at stake to connote a multiplicity of imagined relationships between Turks, Germans, and Jews, for instance (“Touching Tales” 94). Within her paradigm of touching tales, Adelson further draws attention to another crucial term she borrows from Claudia Brodsky Lacour’s work, that of ‘lines of thought’ (“The Turkish Turn” 327). Adelson speculates that “things Turkish” can indeed represent something that is not already known to German Studies. She reads Turkish writing in Germany against the grain of German literary discourse, which “implicitly relegates Turks in Germany to a place imagined to be outside Germany and outside modernity” (“Touching Tales” 118) and offers her version of Turkish “lines of thought” as the bearers of “elements of historical surprise and cultural innovation that our analytical paradigms have yet to register” (“The Turkish Turn” 334). She thus calls for renewed thinking about contemporary German literature and memory work, whose future she sees in the shared experiences of Turks and Germans in the Federal Republic.

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<sup>13</sup> Compared to other former Soviet Bloc countries like Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, and Yugoslavia, whose national authors are relatively known to Western literary critics, Bulgaria’s historical, literary, and cultural heritage, traditions and connections with the West go largely unattended by scholars. (see Thomas Frahm, 2). Such ignorance prompts Julia Kristeva to say: “Bulgarians, invisible, undesirable, a white patch on brightness, dark Balkans pierced by the incuriosity of the West that I belong to” (“Bulgaria, my Suffering” 170).

Many of Adelson's concepts strike me as relevant in the context of the writers I discuss as these 'things Balkan,' inflected by fractured memories and remembered stories, participate in yet another reconfiguration of such figural couples as East/West and self/other. Thus far, the overall Western scholarship on European identity has failed to recognize the continued significance of legacies (be that Ottoman or Soviet) on the formation of Eastern European identities.<sup>14</sup> As representatives of the last generation to be *intellectually* formed under communism,<sup>15</sup> Dinev and Zacharieva's worldviews are based on the historical, ideological, and cultural experience of the Cold War period and its aftermath. In that regard, their fiction, as a cultural artifact, mediates "a revolutionary remapping of the post-communist mind" as their works shape and record the Balkans' totalitarian heritage and the region's complex dialogue with Western Europe (*Over the Wall/After the Fall* 6). I believe, however, that the thematic engagement with the peninsula's communist past and its problematic transitional period is only one of the most visible and perhaps more easily grasped features of Dinev and Zacharieva's literary productions. In fact, the range of themes and mixed pan-European sentiments prevailing in their narratives is far more complex and rests deeply on broader historical narratives about the Orthodox Balkans and its cultural alterity; narratives that inform contemporary public and political discourses about self-worth, Balkan security and ethnic discordance, and inclusion in the EU in almost all Balkan and in many Western countries. In this respect, Dinev and

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<sup>14</sup> This is perhaps due to the fact that Eastern Europe with its socialist/communist legacy is the latest in the chain of historical events, and, therefore, not yet fully explored.

<sup>15</sup> I would like to underscore my interest in the figure of the intellectual "in transit," who not only occupies the in-between of cultures, continents, and languages, but whose voice is the 'native' witness of theoretical migration. A point in case is the above cited French theorist of Bulgarian origin, Julia Kristeva, whose book *Strangers to Ourselves* has had a significant impact in conceptualizing exilic and European identity in both Cultural and Post-Colonial Studies. Along with Tzvetan Todorov, Kristeva is one of the few renowned Bulgarian-born scholars in Western academy.

Zacharieva's narratives too, perhaps less noticeably than Turkish-German tales, evocatively intervene in shaping Germany's and the Balkans' present at this moment of Europe's historical transformation and point toward a shared future.

But let us return now to the second caveat to which Azade Seyhan's quote alludes. The second stipulation concerns the decontextualization of the concepts of hybridity and "third space" from the historically shaped political and social relations in which migrant and diasporic narratives of nation and identities unfold. What happens, for instance, to the concepts of hybridity and liminality as linguistic and cultural disruptions to hegemonic norms when we shift our focus from the concepts' use as metaphors of the crisscrossing cultural spaces of nations and locate them in a different historical and geographical setting? Hybridity is not only the indeterminate, invisible "in between space," which Homi Bhabha terms as *the* interstice critical of essentialist cultures and fixed identities. Hybridity and in-betweenness can invest the imaginary of physical spaces and people with stigmatizing rather than positive characteristics. A case in point is the peripheral Balkan Peninsula and its multi-lingual and multi-racial cultures, whose ambivalent non-fixity had been inscribed in the frozen monolithic image as Europe's Other within.

## **2.2 SYMBOLIC MAPS OF EUROPE: THE BALKANS AS THE EAST WITHIN**

When Edward Said published his seminal work *Orientalism*, he laid the basis for an array of studies concerned with issues of (self)representation, alterity, marginality, hegemony, knowledge and power in the systems of domination as these issues pertained to different parts and peoples in the world. Within the context of Europe, the Saidian critique of Orientalism as both a cultural

apparatus and a political doctrine imposed on the Orient by Western imperialism and colonialism has been not only associated with the Middle East but also with regards to the Balkans, Central, and Eastern Europe. Fueled by Said's insights and the recent geopolitical changes in Europe and on the Balkans throughout the 1990s, a lively scholarly debate emerged concerned with the role, status, and place of Southeastern Europe within the European geographical, cultural, social, scholarly and economic framework and the need for a more equally informed dialogue between the West and the East of Europe. Both drawing on and parting company from Said, Balkan theorists have thus begun to examine in depth the complex web of the West's representational, identificational, and power frameworks within which the Balkans were constituted and to revisit the knowledge about the region and its peoples as a generalized and simplified non-West, thereby charting new directions in the academic field of Balkan Studies.

Among those intellectuals most highly engaged with the Balkan trope is the Bulgarian expatriate and scholar Maria Todorova (born 1949, Sofia, Bulgaria), who established herself in the English-speaking world in the mid-1990s with her studies of past and current constructions of the Balkans in popular and scholarly discourse. In other words, she can be called the founder of a critical Balkan Studies that deconstructs the Balkanist discourse. Todorova's most important intellectual achievement is her groundbreaking study *Imagining the Balkans*—the first discussion of Balkan imagology from an interdisciplinary standpoint. Meticulously researched and highly informative, Todorova's book is an exploration of the roots and routes of a three-century-long history of Balkan representations that started with images of resentment and romanticism and culminated in such stigmatizing figures of today's Balkans as the 'powder keg' and the 'residue of Europe.' Todorova's comparative methodology allows her to show lucidly how the Balkan trope was and is still being used by scholars, international politicians, and journalists as a

powerful rhetorical device that, in a manner similar to that of Orientalism, helped sustain the superiority of a self-essentialized and dominant West.

While acknowledging common characteristics with Orientalism, Todorova draws attention to a factor that has been commonly disregarded by theorists too quick to apply the Saidian approach to the Balkans. This factor concerns the colonial experience of the region as a part of empires, the Byzantine and the Ottoman, which in their pre-colonial and medieval status deviated from Said's colonial model. Said's imperialism, as it becomes clear from the theoretical and historical context of his argumentation, is represented mainly as an imperialism of dichotomies: East versus West, Orient versus Occident. Henceforth, the colonial experience of British India cannot be equated with the experience of the Balkan populations under the five centuries of Ottoman rule or that of the Catholic Habsburgs. As a result of the theocratic character of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires, (i.e., they were designed not as national but as military "non-assimilative and multiethnic entities" [Ivanov, *The Balkans Divided* 27]), the oppressed Orthodox minorities in the Balkans enjoyed, for instance, relative religious and ethnic freedoms and rights. This semi-freedom helped them preserve, to a great extent, their language, traditions and history while shaping different Balkan regions and their cultural, ethnic, and religious configurations, in diverse ways. Adding the Russian (later Soviet) domination to the picture means nothing less than complicating the peculiarity of imperial history on the Balkans. With regard to the latter, the Balkans appear not only as a region of arrested development but also as the legacy of empires that have been persistently viewed in a subordinate position and regarded in the West's imperial imagination as the "Other," (i.e., the counter-image of empire); whether, in Turkey's case, as the "sick man of Europe" and "the poor cousin of the West, perpetually seeking entry into the European Union" (Turhan, *The Other*

*Empire IX*), or, in Russia's instance, as a "learner that is forever *just* about to make the transition into Europe" (Neumann, *Uses of the Other* 112).

Whereas Iver Neumann chooses in his book *Uses of the Other* (1999) the pangolin as a metaphor for Russia's specificity as Europe's Other that never quite fits but is still a part of the East-West taxonomy, Todorova uses for the Balkans the already clichéd metaphor of the bridge that connects and separates concrete and imaginary geographies (Europe and Asia, West and East) and serves as a cross-point between religions (Christendom and Islam), ethnicities, peoples, and cultures (15). Hence, both, Russia and the Balkans are conceptualized as transitional Others; the former being in a *state* of transition of becoming like "us," that is less "different," the latter having the *status* of a transitory territory—semi-colonial, semi-Oriental, half-European, half-civilized, but never fully colonial, fully Oriental, fully European, or fully civilized. This ambiguity and split inherent in Balkan imaginary constructions lead Todorova to further define the Balkans not as the "complete Other" of Europe, as in the case of the Orient, but as Europe's "incomplete Self" that was born, in a manner similar to that of the Orient, as a Western discursive invention loaded with prejudices, political and cultural projections, and contradictory sentiments (18).

Rejecting the widespread hypothesis of the Balkans as liminal or marginal, Todorova advances her thesis of the Balkans' status as the "lowermost," which implies "the shadow, the structurally despised alter-ego" of Europe (18). In Todorova's view, marginality and liminality operate on the same level as the dominant self-image and more often than not the marginal and the liminal open up spaces within which differences between antagonistic types can be negotiated, reinterpreted, or resisted. This, for Todorova, is the basic principle of Said's Orientalism, as a discourse of "a difference between imputed types," Orient vs. Occident, Islam



vs. Christianity, black vs. white (19). The lowermost, by contrast, acquires an even more negative connotation as it represents the lowest stratum of difference within one (the dominant European) type, and as such it disables (the Balkan) subjects, who are already trapped by the formative supremacy of the European gaze, to navigate the hierarchies of power and privilege within this type with great efficacy (19). Such paralysis in agency leads to crisis in a subjectivity that expresses itself in the Balkan self's continuous frustration with its failure to achieve *full* Europeanness. To compensate for this borderline European subjectivity, the Balkan subject, Todorova argues, fiercely erects a self "against an oriental other," whose imaginary varied geographically (from one Balkan people's immediate neighbors to Ottoman Turkey) or temporally (to include a people's traumatic distant past such as Ottoman oppression and its prolonged legacy) (20). Even before Todorova, Milica Bakić-Hayden conceptualized this subjectivizing move as "nesting Orientalisms," insightfully showing that the Western Orientalist rhetoric has its afterlife after having been divorced from its immediate historical context. That is, Orientalist vocabulary can be typical also among Balkanites, who effectively use it to differentiate themselves from other neighboring countries by placing the latter further east in the Balkan imaginary geography. In so doing, the former appear more Western, and, therefore, more civilized. In this case, the use of derogatory terms such as "Balkan shit" quoted in the beginning of this chapter reveals how Western representations and inscriptions of the Balkans into Orientalist paradigms become reappropriated and internalized by these very same Balkanites. Consequently, what we are dealing with is an intensified image of the Balkan peoples as marginals, degenerates, and criminals, in short, the waste of Europe.

In Todorova's view there are two factors that can help us explain the Balkans' peculiar and stigmatizing status as the lowermost and these factors concern the racial and religious

configuration in the region. On the one hand, the Orthodox Balkans are constantly and execratively viewed as the heritage (even if only distantly by now) of Byzantium. Hegel, for instance, condemned Byzantium as “the rotten edifice of the Eastern Empire” that destroyed “the growth of all that is noble in thought, deeds, and person” (qtd. in Bakić-Hayden, “What’s So Byzantine” 61). And on the other hand, the racial medley that one encountered in the Balkans brought confusion to the homogenous West fastening the 19<sup>th</sup> century Western travelers’ beliefs that despite the predominantly Indo-European and Christian Balkan face, those people living in Ottoman Europe were certainly more dark than white, more wild than civilized, more violent than peaceful. While the beginnings of the discourse on Balkanism can be traced partially throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, it was the geopolitical cataclysms (the Balkan Wars and World War I) at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that contributed to the formation and hardening of the Balkanist discursive paradigm that, after several decades of dormancy, reemerged with full vengeance in the 1990s. Of this process, Todorova remarks that in a moment when East and Orientalism are perceived as independent semantic values, the Balkans have entered the worldwide scene of Otherness and alterity as “a convenient substitute for the emotional discharge Orientalism provided, exempting the West from charges of racism, reactionary nationalism, and eurocentrism” (188).

And who could put this process of Balkan reinventions most affectively but also one-sidedly, from the Western point of view, than Robert D. Kaplan (born in 1952, New York), the famous American journalist and author, whose book *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History* (1993) was used as a reference point in America’s decision-making policy for the Yugoslav conflict? In his “A Reader’s Guide to the Balkans,” published in *The New York Times* in the spring of 1993, Kaplan writes,

The key word for understanding the Balkans is *process*: the process of history and the process of memory, processes that Communism kept on hold for 45 years, thereby creating a kind of multiplier effect for violence. Balkan violence is not a phenomenon of “modern hate,” like that in Algeria and the West Bank, fed by rising economic expectations and demographic stress. Southeastern Europe is a caldron of history—of unresolved border disputes and nationality questions created by the collapse of the multinational Hapsburg and Ottoman empires.

The passion with which Kaplan relegates the fate of the Balkan region to eternal rivalries, hatreds, and violence deeply planted in the soil and souls of the Balkans does indeed point to the enduring power of Balkan images of Otherness produced and perpetuated by the aesthetics of Western Balkanist discourse. Viewed through a Todorovian lens, Kaplan’s comment can thus be read as nothing more than a disturbing example of the ways in which neo-Orientalist imaginaries are used in Western accounts about the Balkans as hegemonic strategies that legitimize neocolonial political or economic projects, as we have witnessed in NATO interventions during the Yugoslav wars.

The production of such distorted images of dominated peoples is certainly not a new phenomenon either in the fields of politics and journalism or in the academic and intellectual spheres. Nonetheless, as history shows, the creation and the reverberation of certain frozen imageries and mentalities follow representational trends of the Balkans, trends that are not only time-specific but also context-dependent. For instance, the time period that proved instrumental for the formation of the Balkans as a conceptual and affective category in Western European intellectual thought and imagination was also the time that gave birth to another concept that continues to be commonly invoked in debates concerning the Balkans and the symbolic division

of the Old Continent: the concept of Eastern Europe. Yet, as I illustrate next, what distinguishes the creation of a Balkan imaginary from that of Eastern Europe's is not smoothness and gradual development over the centuries, but its periodic, almost spasmodic, formation that was typically activated and triggered in the context of geopolitical jolts that tended to cluster at given times and eras in this region (e.g., the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Balkan Wars, the two World Wars, totalitarian communism and its fall, and the Bosnian war-conflict). Given the history of violent and less violent events on the Balkans, it should therefore be hardly surprising that the images with which the Balkans and their cultures were depicted would give a rather dark and negative tonality to most of the Balkan representations formed and deformed before and today.

In his book *Inventing Eastern Europe* (1994), published three years before Todorova's *Imagining the Balkans*, Larry Wolff offers a dynamic account of the shifting intra-geographical and mental borders of the European continent throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, drawing attention to the ways in which Eastern Europe became central to the "philosophical geography" and intellectual project of the enlightened European. Taking London, Paris, Vienna, and Berlin as the centers of Europe's geographic imaginary, Wolff's study maps out the civilizational axioms along which Western enlightened travelers and major thinkers such as Voltaire and Rousseau, Mozart and Lessing, Johann Gottfried von Herder and Frederick the Great, and many others, divided the continent, philosophically, ideologically, geographically, and culturally. It was in these cities where civilization began and where it more or less ended at Prussia's eastern borders with Poland. Seen as a spectacle that opened up before the gaze of the Western traveler, writer or politician, who was ready to observe, explore, and evaluate what lay beyond the boundary of the known, Rousseau's and Lessing's Poland, Mozart's Bohemia, Voltaire's Russia,

and the Baltic, emerged as the major philosophical and territorial lines that gave a body to the image of Eastern Europe.

As Wolff perceptively argues, the Eastern periphery of Europe did not form as the antipode to the West of Europe but as its complementary image that made the Westernness of Europe's center even more intense and defined. This kind of thinking is also reflected in Lessing's interest in Poland and Ukraine and in Herder's view of Russia, for whom these countries clearly belonged neither to the Orient nor to the North, but occupied an in-between position, somewhere between wild barbarity and civilization (Wolff 95-96). "The Ukraine will become the new Greece," Herder once noted while he traveled through the northwestern coast of Europe,

the beautiful heaven of this people, their merry existence, their musical nature, their fruitful land, [...] will one day awaken: out of so many little wild peoples, as the Greeks were also once, a (gesittete) mannered nation will come to be. Their borders will stretch out to the Black Sea and from there through the world. Hungary, these nations, and the areas of Poland and Russia will be participants in this new [culture] (Kultur); from the northeast this spirit will go over Europe, which lies in sleep, and make it serviceable according to the spirit. (qtd. in Wolff 307)

What is missing from Herder's words is the biological and geographical hierarchy into which he usually positioned other Oriental cultures. In so doing, he situated the Eastern European lands not as the opposite of Europe's lands but on its fringes; that is, at the frontier between East and West. Of course, Herder's statement should not be taken as the philosopher's unambiguous and unreserved embrace of Slavic cultures. Rather, it can be seen as Herder's initial attempt at

eurocentrism, to chart out, based on the counter-example of Eastern Europe, that which is also desired and necessary, or what he calls “serviceable,” for the European and the German spirit as well.

Herder’s image of the Slavs did not remain as omnipresent as one might wish it had been, but rather gave away to more derogatory representations that reflected the main patterns of Enlightenment thinking and were further fueled by the rise of nationalism, racism, and imperialism in Europe. Backward and underdeveloped were thus often coupled with descriptions that presented different stages at the “scale of civilization.” Because of the persisting conditions of slavery and serfdom in Russia and Poland, Eastern Europeans appeared generally as infants or savages, who could not employ reason because they were left at the level of animalism exacerbated by uncivilized human passion, threatening deceit, and the belief of innate violence. In Germany, it was, for example, the German historical and political writer Heinrich von Treitschke, who employed this Orientalist rhetoric in his *Das deutsche Ordensland Preußen* (*The Prussian Land of the Teutonic Order* 1862), where he justified and glorified the German conquest over Prussia’s Polish minority—a racially inferior people in a backward state of civilization. Treitschke’s depictions of Germany’s most immediate Other, the Poles, echoed the way in which his friend Gustav Freytag captured in his historical Bildungsroman *Soll und Haben* (*Debit and Credit* 1855) his unabashed pride of the German superior race of colonizers and conquerors over the wild and uncivilized Polaken and the spiteful Jews. The popularity of Gustav Freytag’s work extended well beyond the 19<sup>th</sup> century into the era of Nazi Germany, which demonstrated how the literary apotheosis of the German bourgeois worldview mixed with the image of Eastern Europe as the Polish incarnation of unresolved contrasts and how German imperial ambitions can, in turn, acquire a lasting political importance.

Wolff's study shows that in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the mapping of Eastern Europe became first and foremost an organization of various forms of knowledge that ranged from natural history to national history, leading to the more visible differentiation of the east and the west of Europe. Eastern Europe was to a great extent the subject of intellectual appropriation and conquest, for it was central to the West's efforts to differentiate (and conquer in the case of Germany and Poland) these parts of the continent geographically and politically. The West's project of visual representation of the Eastern European lands remained, however, imprecise and incomplete throughout the centuries, presenting a challenge not only to Western cartography but also to the political ambitions of Western monarchs. Thus, for instance, during the 18<sup>th</sup> century European cartography experienced many alterations based on the (in)sufficiency of information provided in travelogues, mathematical or geographical accounts, or the changing pattern of Western geopolitical influence in the East European lands. At times, cartographers expanded the borders of Europe, at other times they rotated or shrunk the limits of the continent by virtue of excluding or including parts of Russia such as Muscovy, erasing Poland, or misrepresenting Hungary by political affiliation with either the Habsburger or the Ottomans or as an independent entity. Nonetheless, what remained clear for the 18<sup>th</sup> century geographer and explorer was that the boundaries between Europe and Asia continued to be permeable, ambiguous, and blurred, with Eastern Europe as the space between Occident and Orient, no matter from which direction one viewed it.

Returning to the history of the creation of Balkan imaginary, we confront an interesting fact that could potentially offer a historical explanation as to why the Balkans continue to be perceived and often evoked as unknown or forgotten lands even today. As Wolff's examination demonstrates, while during the era of European Enlightenment, the Balkans also constituted part

of an object that fell under the gaze of the West, yet, as part of the Ottoman Empire, they remained outside the scope of the West's interest. Known as "European Turkey" or the "European Levant," the Southeastern European lands were thus generally excluded from Europe's map and figured only marginally in travelogues and adventure-descriptions about Eastern Europe. What distinguishes these accounts from accounts about Poland, Russia, Ukraine, and Moldova was the fact that these accounts were based solely on the experience of Westerners traversing these regions, not purposeful of exploring the peoples in these lands and consequently lacking the mathematical, linguistic, and geographical knowledge required in such instances. As a result, these reports proved unreliable and inadequate as sources for understanding the areas situated at the bottom of Europe, which further contributed to the creation of the Balkan image as a black hole, a time before civilization and rationality, incomprehensible and daunting. Indicative in this respect is Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), whose portrayal of the unenlightened "Mittelland" ("middle land") inhabited and haunted by the bloodthirsty Vlad Drakul and his fellow-countrymen continues to prevail in current European-based collective narratives about the vampiric plagues embodied in ethnic and military conflicts throughout the Balkans.<sup>16</sup>

Todorova shows that the West's preoccupation with the Balkans began mostly in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the recession of the Ottoman Empire and the reawakening of European powers' geopolitical interests (e.g., England) in the Balkan lands. It is worth noting that the Balkan area was no longer a passage to be crossed by the European traveler en route to Istanbul, but the final point of destination, observation, and examination. Such interest was followed by an increased flow of travelers southeastwards. In a number of works, the Balkan area emerged as the gate to the East, an in-between space populated by sensuous, semi-civilized

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<sup>16</sup> This tradition of literary depictions continues today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century America. See Elizabeth Kostova's debut novel *The Historian* (2005).



and half Oriental peoples, living in lawlessness and wilderness. It thus was that the Otherness of the Balkans was constituted. It was an Otherness embodied in a civilizational gulf that presented itself between the masculine and the feminine, between that which was termed as West and East. The 19<sup>th</sup> century was also a time when the name “the Balkans” became an established designation for the region. Todorova is, nonetheless, careful to emphasize that there was no singular image or stereotype about the Balkans created by the West. Reciprocally, for the Balkanites, there was no common image of the West. Rather, in the history of Balkan discovery, Todorova argues, discernable is a multiplicity of image-creations of the West, non-uniform and varied; representations that were not only nation- and culture-specific, but also politically, ideologically, and subjectively influenced. Such depictions were not exclusively negative or positive, but an admixture of trends and nuances differently stressed and pronounced with respect to different Balkan nations and peoples.

Highly illuminating in this respect are John B. Allcock and Antonia Young’s *Black Lambs and Grey Falcons: Women Travelling in the Balkans*,” first published in 1991 and Andrew Hammond’s *The Debated Lands: British and American Representations of the Balkans* from 2007. *Black Lambs and Grey Falcons* offers a compilation of individual surveys of a diversity of travelogues, ethnographic collections and descriptions written by women travelers since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Unlike the great Ottoman sympathizer Edward Lear and his accounts of Albania or S. G. B. St. Clair and Charles Brophy’s anti-stories of Bulgaria, the ethnographic and anthropological studies of Rebecca West, Edith Durham, and Emily Balch challenged the mystified image of the Balkan region that prevailed in Europe since at least the 18<sup>th</sup> century. During their charity and education mission before and after the Balkan wars and WWI, West, Durham, and Balch had the unique opportunity to come into direct contact with the locals and to

learn their language, customs, and manners, a valuable experience that added a color to their personal accounts weakening the spell of Balkan violence, cruelty, backwardness, lack of civilization, and ancient hatreds.

And Andrew Hammond's discursive take on the unstable nature of Victorian Balkanism shows how travelogues that directly followed the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century were conditioned by the already established view of the Balkans as a subordinate and ill-fated area, as a region whose fate was to be ruled over by other countries. Consequently, many of the writings produced by Britons at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century activated common Balkan tropes such as barbarity and underdevelopment in order to confirm English superiority over Balkan inferiority and legitimize British political and economic interference in the region, which took the rhetorical guise of the need for a "civilizatory mission" of people who were otherwise incapable of self-governance and stability. The British art of measuring and controlling the host societies along the negative axis of representational practices—irrationalism, regress, disharmony, and obfuscation, Hammond classifies as "an absentee colonialism," a type of colonial signification operative not as much at the level of physical subjugation but at a level of the Balkan region's more or less visible political, economic, and financial dependence upon continental and global markets (128).

The following half century marked a shift in the rhetoric of the representational style of the Balkans by English travelers from denigration of the Balkans to their idealization and/or romanticized reenvisioning. Known as "sentimental primitivism," the mode that English travelogues conveyed was not one of lands of barbarity, but of pastoral and oftentimes medieval landscapes, where the modern Englishman sought spiritual fulfillment and refuge from the hectic nature of Western modernity or the disillusionment of imperialism. Yet, what also becomes

evident is that even such predominantly positive depictions of the Balkans were based on already well-known perceptions of the area as a bridge between East and West, antiquity and modernity, a crossroad and a meeting point for the old and the new. Agatha Christie's first mystery novel *The Secret of Chimneys* (1925) is an example of British romantic fantasies neatly transformed in an obscure Balkan literary invention of a place "Herzoslovakia" that, although endowed with exoticism, represented an inherent threat:

It's one of the Balkan states. Principal rivers, unknown. Principal mountains, also unknown, but fairly numerous. Capital, Ekarest. Population, chiefly brigands. Hobby, assassinating kings and having revolutions. (105)

A year earlier, Thomas Mann in Germany had also envisioned in his novel *Der Zauberberg* (*The Magic Mountain* 1924) a symbolic geographical topography where a seductive, exotic, and barbarous East and a patriarchal, rigid West touched to the point of synthesis. In fact, the novel can be seen as Thomas Mann's alternative version of an eclectic East, revived in a variety of Oriental images rounded out by a mixture of dangerously sensuous and mystic characters from Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and the Far East and replicated ambiances from the Ottoman Empire and the Near East. Mann thus recreated his own simulacrum of an imagined community of cosmopolitan civility that stood in tension with the Nazi surge for imperial hostility.

During the Cold War period, the Iron Curtain served once again to delineate Europe's East/West axis that separated the civilized Europe of the West from the communist, quasi-Oriental European East. The term Balkans disappeared from everyday and political use. On Europe's new map, Southeastern Europe, most Central European countries, and the Soviet Union now clearly belonged to Eastern Europe, as well as divided Germany giving its geopolitical

share. In terms of the German context after 1945, an interesting case can be discerned in the study of postwar German literary representations of Eastern Europe parallel to Germany's division. Many GDR writers like Egon Richter, Helga Schubert, or Stephan Hermlin, for instance, sought to shed negative connotations and render Slavic peoples, in particular Poles, in a positive light diffracted through the discourse of philo-Slavism (Fox, "Imagining Eastern Europe" 285). The German-Polish colonial worldviews once advanced by Treitschke and Freytag were thus slowly replaced by images of the industrious, orderly, and forgiving Polish Other and brother. What came to the forefront was no longer the fascist myth of the age-old and almost natural enmity between Poles and Germans, but the new myth of socialist solidarity and the creation of a common communist present and future.

Nonetheless, images of Eastern Europe remained in many of the texts highly ambivalent and most of the Europe/Orient representational dichotomy, captured in the pairings order/chaos, efficiency/deficiency, civilization/nature, reason/sensuality, and white/black, was preserved (Fox 293). Exemplary in this respect are Rolf Schneider's *Die Reise nach Jaroslaw* (*Travel to Jaroslaw* 1974), Jurek Becker's *Schlaflose Tage* (*Sleepless Days* 1978), and Werner Heiduczek's *Tod am Meer* (*Death at Sea* 1995), three novels that thematize travel eastwards. In these novels, Hungary, Poland, and Bulgaria, respectively, feature for East German travelers as places of tempting sexuality, forbidden love encounters, and idyllically vibrant nature; in short, everything that the cold and gray East German reality lacked. Imag[in]ing these parts as belonging to a grand and mythologized East is a representational tactic that is nothing but self-serving, Fox maintains. For these texts, we can further deduce, disclosed not so much about East Germany's Eastern br(O)thers than about the East Germans, who were ready to imagine a romanticized antifascist world while simultaneously recommitting themselves to Western modernity by

capturing, sympathizing with, and caricaturing the poorer and pre-modern Eastern European versions of themselves.

The late 1980s and the early 1990s were marked not only by the fall of political systems and walls but also by the repositioning of the East/West divide, out of which the Balkans appeared yet again as even more problematic than before. The 1990s were essentially the time when the Balkans experienced their greatest media exposure triggered by the Bosnian conflict and became the focus of Western attention. This time, however, Balkan bloodshed was not met with the benevolent and sympathetic eye of the British Edwardian traveler but by the passive and observing gaze of the Western collective voyeur. Consequently, the Western public sphere witnessed the rebirth of the Victorian interpretative framework of the Balkans as an obfuscated and backward region prone to ethnic disintegration and fragmentation.<sup>17</sup> Stereotypical and clichéd Balkan literary representations once again became common currency and were even further transformed and projected onto the cinematic screen. An interesting example is Steven Spielberg's film *The Terminal* (2004), where the viewer encounters a conflation of Balkan differences and sameness typical for most Western literary representations. Like Agatha Christie's fictional Herzoslovakia, the non-existent Krakozhia is the home of a Balkan traveler, Viktor Navorski (Tom Hanks), who speaks a mixture of Bulgarian and Serbian with a Russian accent. After the Krakozhian government voids all passports due to the country's Civil War, Navorski is denied entry into the U.S. and gets stranded at one of JFK's terminal for months. Depicting Navorski's hardships in the hermetically closed universe of the airport concourse, Spielberg's cinematic appropriation of the Balkan trope can thus be seen as a fictional expression that problematizes the First World's attempts to seal itself off from the threat of invasion from

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<sup>17</sup> For further details, see Andrew Hammond's discussion of the 1990s in *The Debated Lands: British and American Representations of the Balkans* (2007).

other worlds. For contemporary Europe, where migration had become a meta-issue for cultural homogeneity and political security, this meant to fixate once more on the unstable Balkan war-zone in order to remap and recode (i.e., Balkanize) the Old Continent into two worlds using a dichotomy in which the Balkan world appeared as one of shadows cast by a post-Enlightenment Western world.

### **2.3 BALKAN SELF-IMAGES—THEN AND NOW. THE IMMIGRANTS OF THE BALKANS IN THE MIDST OF WESTERN EUROPE AND WHERE THEY STOOD AND STAND**

Yet, these worlds, as history shows us, did not remain isolated and self-contained. On the contrary, the Eastern and Western European hemispheres interacted along the lines of center and periphery, establishing an asymmetry of powers that were geographically, culturally, politically, and economically determined. As early as 1985 Said had already spoken in his book on Orientalism of such an asymmetry of powers. Although we can consider Said's study as an important contribution to Orientalism as a primarily one-directional discursive enterprise of Third-World-representations, stemming from Western centers of power, knowledge, and control, there is a moment in Said's discussion where the scholar explicitly engages with a critique of Occidentalism, or the way in which the West is perceived and treated in the Orient. In a chapter, entitled "Orientalism Now," Said warns of the danger to which Third World cultures are exposed by virtue of adopting or appropriating Western modernization trends (and doctrines) not only in the fields of market economies and consumer culture, but also in the intellectual sphere. His observations thus lead to the conclusion that today "the modern Orient participates [...] in its

own Orientalizing,” thereby moving away from the passivity that characterized the previous Oriental subject (325). In order to think through and about the mechanisms of self-orientalizing practices, Said refers to Antonio Gramsci’s notion of culture “hegemony” (7). In Said’s interpretation of Gramsci, this type of hegemony becomes established and nourished through “the influence of ideas, of institutions, and of other persons” by consent and not through explicit domination (7). Although Said does not go into detail regarding the ways in which processes of self-identification with powers of oppression take place, he seems to approach in his cursory remarks the concepts of self-stigmatizing or self-colonizing cultures that Maria Todorova and Alexander Kiossev later develop with respect to Balkan Otherness.

At the core of Todorova and Kiossev’s argumentation is the insight that, unlike Said’s postcolonials, Balkan subjects were far from passive participants in the creation of their own Orientalization throughout the centuries. The reason for this is, as I show in part 2 of this chapter, the peripheral (half-European) status of the Balkans that has made Balkan cultures not radically Other, like African, Asian, or Caribbean cultures, but just insufficiently Other. “We are European but not quite” proclaimed one of Bulgaria’s greatest writers, Aleko Konstantinov, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; and this stance of in-betweenness reverberates in much of the literature produced in the Balkans (qtd. in Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* 41). Let us pause for a moment and examine the power of the Balkan trope in the literary world of Ivo Andrić (1892-1975).

This is the fate of a man from the Levant, for he is ‘poussière humaine,’ human dust, drifting painfully between East and West, belonging to neither and beaten by both. These are people who know many languages, but none is their own, who

know two faiths, but are steadfast in neither. These are the victims of the fatal division of humanity into Christians and non-Christians, eternal interpreters and go-betweens, but who carry in themselves much that is hidden and inexpressible; people who know well East and West, their customs and beliefs, but are equally despised and mistrusted by either side. (*The Days of the Consuls* 240-241)

These are the words of Cologna, one of the main characters in the Bosnian writer Ivo Andrić's novel *The Days of the Consuls* (*Travnicka Chronika* 1945). The central pathos in Andrić is certainly not the celebration of ambiguity and the negation of fixity. Rather, it is premised on the acceptance of the universality of the East-West divide as essentialist dichotomies, whose incompatibility opens up a third, in-between space, that of the Balkans. "They [the Balkans] are the 'third world,' where all malediction settled as a result of the division of the earth in two worlds" (Andrić 241). Within this space, difference is to be articulated and captured in the formula of *not being* rather than on *being*. That is, the Balkans' difference can be legitimized only negatively, as "a separate humanity," whose "malediction" or curse is that of being positioned in the interstice of the East-West opposition.

What is also remarkable about this quote (and there are definitely ample similar examples in Balkan literature) is that Cologna's words echo Maria Todorova's statement about Balkanism as a discourse of "imputed ambiguity" that has been rejected by both Westerners and Balkanites alike. What this means for the Balkan subject is that, unlike the Third World's radical Otherness that has been primarily viewed as *the* driving force necessary for the transformation of the cultural, epistemological, and ideological boundaries of Europe and beyond, the alleged ambivalence in the Balkans' Otherness has acted rather as a traumatizing factor in the constitution of peculiar Balkan identities. The peculiarity of Balkan identities expresses itself in



the differentness of the Balkan subject as a less desirable kind of European, who, as the quote from Andrić's novel illustrates, is rendered bad, dangerous, or weak. The discrediting effect of such attributes has persisted over time to the extent that these attributes have become the basis for stigma closely connected to the question of temporal and developmental lag into which Balkan countries have fallen. As Balkan elite perceived it, this lag was artificial. More specifically, Balkan intellectuals saw the backwardness of their Balkan countries not as inherent in their nature, but as the result of the region's Ottoman and Russian imperial rules that "severed eastern Europe from what is often described as its own evolution within its own larger organic space: Europe" (Todorova, "The Trap of Backwardness" 160). Within the dynamics of such spatial imaginary, the West/Europe thus appears as the *norm*; that is, the privileged universal and containing boundary of nations, territories, and identities, to which Balkanites have sought integration, and less, as Homi Bhabha has conceived it in the context of Third World countries and their intellectuals, as "a threshold [that can be] cross[ed] over intellectually, ideologically, ethically, [a threshold that leads] onto other territories" ("Forget Europe. An Interview with Homi Bhabha" n. pag.). Therefore, in order to compensate for their countries' lack of values, norms, or even the whole Western civilizational model, Balkan ruling classes began, as Alexander Kiossev claims, "to 'conquer' and 'colonize' [themselves] by lovingly using alien values," thereby compromising their own authenticity ("Notes on Self-Colonizing Cultures" 115). The effects of such historically-old attempts to compensate for the lack or absence (of values, norms, and ideas), backwardness (in all its forms), and catching up (with enlightened Europe) have led, in Todorova's terms, to the *self-stigmatization*, and in Kiossev's conceptualizations, to the traumatic *self-colonization*, of Balkan cultures, for such process (also known as provincial Europeanization) was never neutral but negatively and emotionally

charged.<sup>18</sup> Expanding on the psychological effects of, in his words, the “traumatic mirror discourse [of] native Balkanism” (“The Dark Intimacy” 182), Kiossev remarks that the processes of symbolic colonization implied the internalization of “the gaze of the other” (in the Balkans’ case, the gaze of the West) as *the norm* for nativist self-representations, as a consequence of which the Balkan self experienced itself as void, “impure, non-true, absent” (“Notes on Self-Colonizing Cultures” 116). This “Self-lessness” was a further symptom for stigma and the acceptance of the clichéd image of the Balkans as something abnormal, ignoble, and undesirable, which resulted at times in feelings of self-loathing (failure, shame, insecurity, worthless, and self-disgust). A few decades earlier (1948), Sartre had described the same tendency of self-devaluation and self-hatred with respect to the Jew who stigmatizes himself in the fear of conforming to stereotypical representations (*Anti-Semite and the Jew* 96). At other times, the deficiency of self-esteem in the Balkan context mutated into forms of hostility or resentment (anger and aggression) that had either an ethnic twist or were directed against Western Europe’s past involvements in the region, which had, historically, harmful consequences for the fate and integrity of the Balkan peoples and their countries (“The Dark Intimacy” 182-183). While the first instance can be detected in the behavior of migrants or Balkan intellectuals abroad, the second instance, Kiossev makes clear, finds its expression in the resurgence of nationalist movements and the unfortunate butchery in the Balkans, most notably in Serbia and Bosnia in

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<sup>18</sup> Although it is true that in recent decades there has been a tendency among Southeast Europeans to accept more positively their ambiguity as an enriching symbiosis between East and West, Christendom and Islam, rather than as a disabling mixture, it is also true, as Todorova shows, that negative attitudes continue to be more prevalent within Balkan cultures, thereby perpetuating the Balkan negative image on both cross- and intracultural levels. The latter’s effect becomes most visible and pronounced in the continuous formation of the already well-known and explicit hierarchization in the understanding of Balkan intellectuals and general population, with the West (i.e., Europe) as the highest measurement for civilized and enlightened politics, fast economic development, and humanistic-social program, in short, everything that the Balkans lack (Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* 60).

the 1990s.

The reader will have discerned by now the language of psychoanalysis that I have adopted in the previous two paragraphs. As a matter of fact, Balkan scholars have begun using terms such as stigma and trauma to explain the effects of social exclusion and avoidance on the perceptions, self-perceptions, behaviors, and worldviews of individuals and collectives. Studies on stigma have underscored the importance of understanding how processes of stigmatization alter conceptions of what is considered normal and how such conceptions relate to the dilemmas that differences pose. It is natural, as Lerita M. Coleman remarks, that individuals do not like to be viewed as abnormal and undesirable (“An Enigma Demystified” 224). “Normality,” Coleman claims, “becomes the supreme goal for many stigmatized individuals until they realize that there is no precise definition of normality except what they would be without their stigma’ (224).

While some stigmatized individuals choose to “pass” by concealing their stigma, other individuals reject their inferior status, and this helps them emerge as stronger personalities. The ultimate regaining of subjectivity, according to Coleman, is when individuals question and reconsider the notion of normality because this will lead them to acceptance of themselves (225).

The question of stigma is also an issue of importance for whole communities and studies of migration, because, as Becker and Arnold argue, stigma appears “intraculturally” as well as “crossculturally” and varies over time (“Stigma as a Social and Cultural Construct” 56).

Migrants become stigmatized for numerous reasons that range from lower economic and social status to differences in race, skin color, and religious beliefs. In fact, as sociologists claim, stigma continues to be a social problem, because it is perpetually used by host societies as a means to control certain foreign populations that the former fear as dangerous intruders, especially in times of economic and social crisis (Coleman 229). The same relationship is also

visible on a larger scale with the entry of some Balkan countries into the EU. In order for individuals and collectives to be destigmatized, it is important that both sides participate in the process (Coleman 229). That is, people or collectives that tend to stigmatize other individuals or groups can benefit from seeing not only the differences but also the similarities between them and those that are socially ostracized, Coleman claims (229). Yet, for the process to be complete, the stigmatized likewise need to become involved in debunking any stigma that surrounds them. It is more often than not the affective and emotional attitude with which stigmatized individuals approach their stigmatization that influences the further response of the non-stigmatized (Coleman 229). In other words, the focus on negativity and low self-esteem will elicit a negative reaction in the non-stigmatized. Conversely, a more positive approach will result in lowering the perceptions of inferiority. In either instance, the assuming of certain attitudes becomes a matter of personal choice, Coleman maintains, so the change in one's behavior is a more complex process because it is indispensable from the values and standards that are upheld by society as a whole (230).

Returning to the context of the Balkans, I want to emphasize that the constitutive force in this specific process of active internalization and contestation of outside perceptions was and continues to be the Balkan intellectual elite whose origins can be traced back to the first migration wave westwards, fueled by the weakening and consequent dissolution of Ottoman rule in the Balkan region. In a significant way, the first Balkanites who went to study abroad embodied the seeds of the Balkan intelligentsia that was to pave the way for not only different forms of local nationalisms, pan-slavisms, or pan-Europeanisms, but also for the multiple contradictions and ambiguities that have come to inform past and current stigma-images and self-perceptions of the Balkans as simultaneously in and out of Europe. Therefore, a short

inquiry into the historical role of Balkan intellectual migration in reshaping the Balkan discursive geography at home and abroad is in order. The examples that I would like to pull into my discussion I have narrowed down to the Bulgarian context for they represent most poignantly my argument regarding the two writers of Bulgarian origin I examine in the next two chapters of this dissertation. However, I occasionally make references to other neighboring countries in order to situate this study within the broader context of cultures of Balkan migration.

Balkan transnational migration westwards today is hardly a new and isolated occurrence in time, but a long-term phenomenon whose past precursors have also contributed to the continuously, albeit slowly, changing face of Europe. Different in this respect are the reading paradigms through which theorists have conceptualized previous and current migratory movements, as these reading paradigms followed the change and the dynamic shifts in the causes and patterns of migration. Closely connected with the rise of transnational cultural and global studies, theoretical paradigms today increasingly view migrants, who are already permanently settled, as actors that are more or less actively involved in the reshaping of the institutional, economic, social, and cultural landscapes in the respective receiving countries and to a lesser extent in their sending countries. By contrast, migration to Western Europe at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is considered in mostly descriptive terms as two-directional and temporary, as most of the migrants' stay abroad was short-lived and followed by a return to the home country. Consequently, it would be exaggerated to claim that the consequences of these migration processes for the change and stability in the demographic and economic structures in the host countries were explicitly felt and discussed, as is the case today. Indeed, I argue that these early migration waves to the West proved most vital for the development of their sending countries as most of the Balkan countries, because of their long history of Turkish and Habsburg domination,

found themselves, in contrast to Western Europe where stable nations were already the norm, in the initial phases of nation-making. For the purposes of this survey, I will, therefore, discuss these early migration waves under the rubric of cultural exchange, as it will best allow me to show how these early migrants became the links that channeled Western ideas and values as *the norm* into the newly forming Balkan nation-states and, in so doing, they created the foundation for the ambiguous Balkan identity.

Conditioned by such fateful events as the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the outbreak of the Balkan Wars, and the two World Wars, migration flows from Southeastern to Western Europe were a common phenomenon in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and comprised a specific social and economic profile that changed over time. With the weakening of the Ottoman empire in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, trade between the Ottoman European and German lands experienced a radical growth leading to an intensified flow of seasonal workers and tradesmen interested in selling their products abroad as well as in gaining experience and collecting new ideas. The consequent renewal of the cultural and political relations between the Western and Eastern European states brought with itself a change in the demographics of eastern migration. The newly formed Bulgarian state, for instance, where a number of German schools were built in a short period of time at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and whose political government replicated the German model,<sup>19</sup> experienced an urgent need for the education of cultural capital

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<sup>19</sup> After Bulgaria's liberation from the Ottomans, the German prince Ferdinand Sax-Coburg-Gotha (1861-1948) was selected to govern the country and was crowned monarch of the new Bulgarian state (1908-1918). During his reign, the predominantly agrarian Bulgarian society experienced its first burst of industrial progress. Boris III succeeded his exiled-in-Germany father and established a royal dictatorship in Bulgaria in the 1930s, bringing general stability to the country but weakening it politically. Boris is remembered as a ruler who not only tried to prevent the inclusion of the Bulgarian army in WWII, (after the Axis Powers [Germany and Italy] forced him and Bulgaria to sign a pact in 1941), but also saved thousands of Bulgarian

and intellectual and professional elite. Like almost every other Balkan country at the time, the Bulgarian state, in cooperation with different educational institutions in Germany, France, the Russian and the Habsburg Empires, sent its best students on scholarships abroad to study and specialize in Europe's most popular educational centers: Odessa, Kiev, Prague, Vienna, Munich, Leipzig, and Paris. Compared to other Balkan nations, Bulgarian students were best represented in Austria and Germany, outnumbering their fellow students from Serbia, Greece, or Turkey. The Bulgarian and Romanian majority was in fact so explicitly noticeable in the 1920s that it even found literary mentioning in one of Heimito von Doderer's novels *Die Strudlhofstiege oder die Melzer und die Tiefe der Jahre* (1951). The novel opens with a depiction of a world inhabited by strange accents and well-to-do Balkanites:

Rumänen und Bulgaren hat es zu Wien immer gegeben, meist im Umkreise der Universität oder der Musik-Akademie. Man war sie gewohnt: ihre Art zu sprechen, die immer mehr mit dem Österreichischen sich durchsetzte, ihre dicken Haarwirbel über die Strin, ihre Gewohnheit, stets in den besten Villenvierteln zu wohnen, denn alle diese jungen Herren aus Bukarest oder Sofia waren wohlhabend oder hatten wohlhabende Väter. Sie blieben durchaus Fremde [...], nicht so konsolidiert fremd wie die Norddeutschen zwar, sondern mehr eine sozusagen hiesige Einrichtung, dennoch eben 'Balkanesser', weil auch bei ihnen sich das spezifische ihres Sprachtones nie ganz verlor. (9)

There were always Romanians and Bulgarians present in Vienna, mostly in connection with the university or the music academy. People were used to them, to their way of talking that, along with the Austrian manner of speaking, became

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Jews from deportation and death. Bulgaria is, in fact, the only German ally, whose Jewish population remained intact. Boris died mysteriously after a visit with Hitler in 1943.

more and more accepted, to their thick swirls of hair on their foreheads, to their habit of always living in the best neighborhoods, because all these young men from Bucharest or Sofia were wealthy or had wealthy fathers. They thoroughly remained strangers [...] but their strangeness was not as hardened as that of the Nord Germans. Rather, it was so to speak a local construction, yet still Balkanist, because the specificity of their voice intonation never disappeared.<sup>20</sup>

In many ways, international Vienna and its flourishing publishing culture provided entrepreneurial and enlightened Eastern Europeans the most favorable conditions for the printing and distribution of specialized literature—an activity that played a major role in fostering the national renaissance of the Slavic people. But among all the mentioned cities, it was the city of Leipzig that became long before the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the most important trade and cultural center for representatives of the developing young middle-class intellectuals in nearly every Eastern and Southeastern state in Europe (Walter, “Leipzig als ein kulturelles Zentrum” 29). A meeting point for thinkers, writers, and artists, Leipzig offered Slavic students the unique chance to acquaint themselves with Enlightenment thinking, German literature, the natural sciences, and medicine and to use this knowledge as the norm according to which they measured progress in their home countries. In a book published in 1938, the director of the Bulgarian National Library, Veliko Jordanov, counts over 3000 Bulgarians who studied at Leipzig’s educational institutions in the period between 1878 and the mid-1930s in disciplines as diverse as mathematics, law, history, geography, literature, etc (*Leipzig und die Bulgaren* 137-141). From this pioneer generation of Bulgarian students, five became ministers, twenty professors, thirty five high school directors, two bank directors, three directors of the national library, three

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<sup>20</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from German or Bulgarian into English are by Boryana Dobрева.



directors of publishing houses, three writers, and so on; in short, the ruling intelligentsia of post-liberation Bulgaria (Jordanov 137-141). The importance of Leipzig as the cradle where Bulgarian intellectuals were nursed with the ideas, emotions, and experiences of the West was indeed so great that in the early 1920s the city became eternalized by Kiril Hristov, one of Bulgaria's greatest poets and novelists. In his *March of the Bulgarian Students*, Leipzig appears as the hearth of wisdom for the hundreds of Bulgarian men and women who went there to nurture their passion for knowledge:

Ehrwürdig` Leipzig voller Fröhlichkeit,  
in dir brennt ewiges Feuer,  
leuchtest den Kindern des Balkans weit,  
bist ihnen als Wissensquell teuer. (qtd. in Endler, "Kiril Christovs Leipziger  
Jahre" 60)

Venerable Leipzig filled with happiness,  
An eternal fire burns in you,  
You enlighten the path of the children of the Balkans,  
And are their treasured spring of knowledge.

Concerning the German image in the consciousness of the Balkan migrant intellectual elite abroad, it needs to be underscored that the perception of Germany has been by no means a unified one, but marked by contradictions, inconsistencies, and above all, by each individual's experience and contacts with the host country. Thus, for instance, some of the earlier accounts in Bulgarian literary historiography, in which Germany, the Germans, and other German-language cultures appear, are predominantly positive and primarily connected with issues of Christian religion and the higher level of education in the German and Austrian Lands. Notable in this

respect is the 1757 biography of Partenij Partenovic, who spent a great deal of time in Vienna, spoke German, and was well acquainted with German cultural and literary developments. In his biography, Partenovic expresses his desire to study at the Saxon Academy as well as his disapproval of Prussia's foreign policy. Of greater importance, however, is another enlightened Bulgarian, the monk Paisij Hilendarski, whose *Славянобългарска история* (*Slavobulgarian History* 1762) played a crucial role in the formation of Bulgarian national consciousness and identity. In his *History*, that was later published as a textbook and distributed in all Bulgarian schools, Hilendarski's mentioning of Germany is only indirect, in conjunction with the medieval battles that Bulgarian kings led either against their immediate neighbors, the Greeks, or as allies of the Germans. Based on the rhetoric of Paisij's account, it becomes clear that Paisij, who, as he mentions, went to the German lands to collect evidence for his Bulgarian history, considers the Germans not only civilized but also advanced in historiography and in matters of religious freedom and tolerance. In addition, his narrative conveyed an image of the German people as fearless and honest warriors, an image that is to be found thirty years later in the works of Spiridon, another Bulgarian monk.<sup>21</sup>

Throughout the 19th century, there was a slight shift in the Bulgarian perception of Germany and the Germans connected with Germany's assertion as one of the leading forces in the intellectual and cultural development of Europe's Enlightenment. The image of an enlightened Europe is enriched by Konstantin Fotinov (1790-1858), whose first periodical *Ljuboslovie* (1842) references German philosophers and includes historical and geographical overviews of the German lands, their climate, and language as well as translations of works by

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<sup>21</sup> For more details on the earliest written accounts see Nadja Danova "Das Bild der Deutschen in bulgarischen Texten des 15. bis 19. Jh.s" ("The German-Image in Bulgarian Texts From the 15<sup>th</sup> Until the 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries" 2003).

Anselm von Feuerbach. In his geography books, Ivan Bogorov (1818-1892), an eminent encyclopedist during the Bulgarian revival period, continues the tendency set by Fotinov by emphasizing the richness of the ethnic, folkloric, and agricultural German landscapes, and above all, general religious freedoms. Furthermore, Bogorov uses German industry and trade as an example of excelling and perfectionism in organization and order; all important characteristics that continue to inform Bulgarian ideas of German progress today.

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Bulgarian cultural figures who studied abroad, such as Ivan Dobrovski (1812-1896) in Vienna, Peter Beron (1798-1871) in Munich, and Marko Balabanov (1837-1921) in Heidelberg, strengthened the perceptions of German cultural and intellectual superiority. In miscellaneous writings, both Dobrovski and Balabanov stressed to their Bulgarian audiences that the Germans are “eines der aufgeklärten europäischen Völker” (“one of the most enlightened European peoples”), whose quick advancement was made possible by writers and thinkers like “Klopstock, Kleist, Gellert, Gessner, Lessing, Herder, Schiller, Goethe, Wieland, Bürger, Leibnitz, Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Schelling, Schläzer usw” (qtd. in Danova 78-79). Historical persona like Martin Luther and Jan Hus received equally sympathetic attention in Todor Ikonov (1838-1892) and Bogdan Goranov’s (1847-1907) ruminations of how German practicality in decision making could positively influence the reformations within the Bulgarian Orthodox church.

Negative depictions of Germany and the Germans were not missing, of course, although they seemed to be less prevalent at the end of the nineteenth century. The darker tonality was most pronounced in the works of Bulgarian revolutionaries like Hristo Botev (1848-1876) and Georgi Sava Rakovski (1821-1867). While the former set out to prove that the Bulgarian people possessed the oldest culture in Europe and their literature predated that of the Germans, who

were back then “reine Wilde” (“pure savages”) who fed on “Eicheln im Wald und waren ganz schriftlos” (“acorns in the forests and were completely unlettered”), the latter criticized Western European countries’ passive acceptance of the violent Ottoman presence in Europe (qtd. in Danova 80). Accusing Germany, Austria, and Russia of their secret plans to distribute the former Ottoman European lands among themselves, Botev did not spare either Bismarck or Gorcakov from his devastating critique.

The Bulgarian poet Geo Milev (1895-1925), who was critical of or rather disillusioned about the reality that met him in Germany, also spent some of his most formative years as a student in Leipzig at the dawn of World War I. In a letter dated 1913, Milev wrote:

The things one thinks of and talks about Germany are not exactly like that. I am impressed the least by one of Germany’s largest cities, like Leipzig. [...] Our Sofia is a prettier city, although the downtown here is covered with wooden pavement.  
*(Bulgarian Literature—Writers and Issues 283-4)*

Comparing Bulgaria’s cultural development to that of the West, Milev continued:

We too have great things and a great people, and great professors, and great actors, and great poets. [...] And one has it wrong to think as they shout at home: “The West, the West! Europe! Germany! The West!” [...] The Europeans are yet to turn their gaze toward us and see that behind Serbia there is some kind of Europe, some kind of “East” for them, greater than Serbia. Here, they only know Serbia because of its close proximity, and that’s why Serbia is regarded as the first of the Balkans. Others, others are the leaders, Mr. Europeans. You will see them. In times gone, we were the chieftains of Slavdom; this damn Slavdom, we gave books and education, and now the faith has given us, the smallest people, a

new task, to be its regenerators. And we will proudly be and are—the smallest and the greatest of all Slavs! (285)

In Milev's words, we discern a tendency that can be traced in the attitudes of other Bulgarian intellectuals abroad to "seek integration that carries in its own presence an attempt at differentiation," as well as, I would like to add, the strive for recognition (Koneva, "The Mythical and the Real" 236). The same principle is further translated into the process of national identity-building and self-understanding, where the second feature, that of external approval captured in Europe's gaze, becomes dominant in this duality as soon as the question of the peripheral and marginal Bulgarian identity enters the debates surrounding Europe/the West and Bulgaria's place in the hierarchy within Europe's geographical and cultural hemisphere. Alexander Kiossev remarks that this is a stigmatizing move not only typical of Bulgarians but also of other Balkan nations that, aware of their peripheral and irrelevant status, have tried to compensate for their insignificance by employing various shades of ambivalent self-stigmatization, self-westernization, or self-exotization in their self-representations ("The Dark Intimacy" 180). Milev's words point to the same "split between self-demands and self (Goffman, *Stigma* 7). That is, Milev emphasizes one people's authenticity as a crucial agent in world history while simultaneously reproducing the nesting Orientalism already described by Milica Bakić-Hayden.

The interwar years were to an extent a period when the representatives of national intelligentsia acquired a somewhat more sober attitude that helped in solving the complex dilemma of Bulgarian inferiority in relation to the West at the time. Nonetheless, the sense of delayed development continued to haunt Bulgarian self-evaluations and it found new shape during communism when the Bulgarian ruling elite sought external legitimization and focus in

its older brother, the Soviet Union. Not surprisingly, Bulgaria became known as the “most obedient satellite of Moscow” during this time (qtd. in Kelbecheva, “Bulgarian Cultural Identity” n. pag.). The transitional 1990s resurrected Europe from the oblivion into which the East had fallen after the 1950s, and the resumed marathon for catching up with the Old Continent’s latest civilization models appeared in full force. Political, social, cultural, and ethnic debates brought into vogue well known terms such as ‘backwardness,’ ‘progress,’ ‘survival,’ ‘prosperity,’ ‘barbarity,’ and ‘power.’ These terms were coupled with new ones this time: ‘corruption,’ ‘passivity,’ ‘naïveté,’ ‘blindness,’ ‘disgrace,’ ‘shame,’ ‘disintegration,’ and ‘incompetence.’ Bulgarian cultural identity was exposed once more to a number of negative denotations that oscillated between Balkan, Eastern European, non-European, and half-Oriental. Reduced to a state of “poverty and hopelessness” triggered by “the current economic collapse and [Bulgaria’s] last unchallenged place in the race to Europe,” Bulgarian cultural identity, for Evelina Kelbecheva, was thus stripped of pride bearing solely the ambiguous silence of a people who can hardly see themselves marching towards a common better future (n. pag.).

In reference to Ernest Renan’s essay “What is a Nation?”, Alexander Kiossev makes an interesting point that approximates Kelbecheva’s opinion. Quoting Renan, Kiossev remarks that there are two basic principles that play a crucial role in the identification processes of a people as a national entity. The first aspect is that of a “political nation,” which expresses itself in the political will of a community to live together as a societal whole. And the second—“cultural nation”—refers to Benedikt Anderson’s imagined community that points further back to the transcendent idea of the 18<sup>th</sup> century German *Kulturnation* as a nation of shared values and of common cultural, linguistic, and religious heritage and traditions. According to Renan, “[t]o have common glories in the past, a common will in the present; to have accomplished great things

together, to wish to do so again, that is the essential condition of being a nation” (“Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?” 17). Drawing on the Bulgarian context, Kiossev opposes Renan’s view that indeed these two principles are connected to the extent that they equal each other in the renewal of a nation (“Notes on Self-colonizing Cultures” 116). Kiossev claims that when cultures of absence are involved, the resurgence from a traumatic past, especially when tinted with emotional nuances of shame and defeat, there is not always a desire to continue and imagine a communal life and future (117). In other words, even national sorrows and having suffered together—in Renan’s eyes *the* major prerogative that binds people together—are not always enough, in Kiossev’s view, to produce anything new and positive as a vision. Instead, what is present is a pride “doubled-up with a curse” (116). That is, the internalization of group symbols that results from one’s association with a community’s glorious past goes hand in hand with the internal self-alienation or distancing from community belonging; the latter being the result of an individual’s stigma—an unavoidable awareness of being inferior or of lesser value, mostly experienced in and through the cultural contacts with an(other) greater nation.

While such an interpretation cannot and should not be taken as the *pars pro toto* explanation for the peculiarities informing the processes of Bulgarian self-understandings and self-evaluations today, it does offer a basis on which strategies of identification with and dis-identification from nation, language, and ethnicity can be conceptualized. Examples, in this context, are ample and can be traced from the very first text of Bulgarian national revival, the already mentioned *Slavobulgarian History*, written by the monk Paisij Hilendarski (1722-1773) in 1762, to our contemporary, the intellectual expatriate, Julia Kristeva (born in 1941) and her essay, “Bulgaria, My Suffering” from 2000. Let us consider the rhetoric of these two texts, which feature at times striking similarities. Hilendarski’s text begins:

Oh thou unreasonable, oh you silly fool? Why are you ashamed to call yourself a Bulgarian? Is it not true that Bulgarians had a kingdom and a state of their own? Among all the Slavic peoples it was precisely the Bulgarians who were the most glorious nation—they were the first to crown their kings, they were the first to have an Orthodox patriarch, they were the first to be baptized and they have conquered the greatest territories. (qtd. in Kiossev, “Notes on Self-Colonising Cultures” 116)

And in “Bulgaria, My Suffering,” Kristeva heightens Hilendarski’s affective stance that reproduces the humiliation of her inferior origins—the very conditions of which she is trying to escape:

you, history’s unclaimed baggage who try to catch hold of history again without much idea of how to go about it, you, Bulgarians, invisible, undesirable, a white patch on brightness, dark Balkans pierced by the incuriosity of the West that I belong to. [...] and although you got up too early you arrive too late in a world that is too old but is constantly rejuvenating itself and doesn’t like latecomers. [...] You hurt me, my fellows, my brothers. Bulgaria, my suffering. (170)

Notable in both quotes is Kiossev’s double move of association with and repulsion from a collective that is at once marked by brotherhood and foolishness. Despite the touch of humiliation in Hilendarski’s words, the monk, unlike Kristeva, maintains in the end a positive note that highlights the strengths and gloriousness of the Bulgarian past. Kristeva takes a radically conservative turn that leads her to the rejection of Bulgarian identity. A look at her published theoretical works reveals that this essay is Kristeva’s only explicit engagement with her Balkan identity as a troubled, borderline European subjectivity. The gist of Kristeva’s self-



alienation does not lead, however, to a deeper exploration of the geopolitical ambiguity informing the Balkan region or of her, as Dušan Bjelić remarks, “carefully” crafted cosmopolitanism in her other intellectual writings (“The Balkans: Radical Conservatism” 286).

Adopting a Gramscian perspective that underscores the importance of the specific historical and geographical setting that informs intellectual labor as a social practice, Bjelić shows in his article “The Balkans: Radical Conservatism and Desire” that instead of being empowered by the Balkans’ marginal geography (as is usually the case with postcolonial intellectuals), Kristeva, as well as Slavoj Žižek, perform a contrary move that privileges European intellectual superiority and orientalizes once again the Balkan region as the Other within Europe. It is a move that corresponds to Erving Goffman’s description of the ways in which stigmatized individuals attempt “not only to ‘normify’ their own conduct but also to clean up the conduct of others in the group” (*Stigma* 108). Taking place “in the process of ‘nearing,’ that is, of the individual’s coming close to an undesirable instance of his own kind while ‘with’ a normal,” such ambivalence in identity can find for Goffman its more explicit expression in written and spoken forms as well as in the behavior of these individuals (108). Bjelić deciphers this “self-orientalizing antagonism” in Žižek and Kristeva in the psychoanalytic approach (language of desire and Oedipal revolt) that both scholars use to construct their political and cultural theories of exile and estrangement, respectively (289). A major factor in this regard is Lacan’s theory of the split subject as indicative of modern subjectivity, on which Kristeva and Žižek build their arguments. For Bjelić, the Lacanian imagery utilized by these two theorists leads to the reconstitution of the intra-European spatial hierarchies, according to which the West is conceptualized as the symbolic father and the East as the archaic mother (287). In Žižek and Kristeva, Bjelić sees in this way the stigmatizing tendency to represent the Balkans as the

maternal space that both theorists ostracize and negate. Kristeva does this through her own theory of abjection (of the sick and troubled Balkan/Bulgarian minds):

You suffer from chaos, from vandalism, from violence. You suffer from the lack of authority. You suffer from corruption, the absence of initiative, the sloppiness that redoubles and unprecedented brutality on the individual level, the arrogance of the mafia and the scams of the newly rich. The West finds it hard to imagine your suffering, your humiliation. ("Bulgaria, My Suffering" 176)

And "Germanocentric" Žižek completes his act of matricide by adopting the Freudian map of Europe, on which the Slovenes' "unanalyzability" stretches to envelop the rest of the Balkan peoples (qtd. in Bjelić 291). Henceforth, as Žižek and Kristeva decouple their intellectual labor from the material conditions into which it was born, they paradoxically reinforce and reenact the stigma brought about by the frustrations of being linked to the spatial, temporal, and physical boundaries of Balkan imaginary and marginality (Bjelić 302).

In the Bulgarian context, Kristeva, of course, is not alone. Evelina Kelbecheva remarks that, compared to the first (early 20<sup>th</sup> century) and second political (the interwar period) migration waves westwards, since the 1960s, "Bulgarian identity in the West [does] not praise itself with a vivid, defined, and worthy presence" (n. pag.). The much-celebrated artist, Christo (born in 1935) and his wife Jeanne-Claude (1935-2009), whose artistic project to wrap the Reichstag in fabric made him famous in the 1990s; Dimiter Gotscheff (born in 1943), who belongs to the generation of well-known German theater directors, such as Peymann, Stein, Zadek, or Heiner Müller; or the controversial Bulgarian writer Viktor Paskov (1949-2009), a composer, an opera singer, and a former graduate of the Musical Academy in Leipzig in the 1980s, are some of the prominent names of Bulgarian emigrants known to the world, but not as

emblems of Bulgarian cultural traditions abroad. As Kelbecheva summarizes it, Christo's decision to conduct his interviews with Bulgarian journalists in French, Gotcheff's refusal to perform on a Bulgarian stage, and Paskov's condemning of the Cyrillic alphabet as the reason for his intellectual isolation demonstrate with no doubt the lack of desire on the part of these cultural figures to articulate some kind of connection with their life and intellectual Bulgarian background. A counter example would be that of the French-Bulgarian theorist, Tzvetan Todorov (born in 1939 in Sofia), whose studies in French, such as *Les Morales de l'histoire* 1991 (*The Morals of History* 1995), *La Fragilité du bien: le Sauvetage des Juifs bulgares* 1999 (*The Fragility of Goodness: Why Bulgaria's Jews Survived the Holocaust* 2001), *Le Nouveau Désordre mondial: Réflexions d'un européen* 2003 (*The New World Disorder: Reflections of A European* 2004) and others are the intellectual's clear expression of his Bulgarian identity.

Of course, such acts of (dis)identifications are also a matter of personal choice for someone who, after having fled the atrocities of a totalitarian regime, acts and speaks as a subject who does not consider himself a representative of a given social, national, or ethnic group. Additionally, let us not forget the universal language of art that more easily supersedes specific cultural and national identities, and by extension, leads to a more unproblematic dispersal of other attached negatively-laden denotations such as Balkan or Eastern European. Referring to Todorov's autobiography, *L'Homme Depayse* (1996), Nathan Bracher points out that for the intellectual Todorov, however:

such specific cultural identities are neither immutable nor incompatible with each other: through contact and exchange with other languages and cultures, this cultural identity may in fact be enriched without losing its own unique [Bulgarian, Balkan, or Eastern European] character. ("History, Memory, and Humanism" 39)

It is this choice of preserving the Sartrean authentic freedom that becomes the major prerogative for Todorov and for every intellectual engaged in ‘critical humanism,’ where the individual is actively involved in dialogue both as a scholar of the humanities and as a citizen of his or her societies.

## **2.4 BRIDGING THE GAP: EAST AND WEST IN THEORY AND PRACTICE**

As I proceed toward the end of this chapter, it is important to stress that my inquiry into the peculiar role of Balkan migrant intelligentsia in the formation of Balkan self-identifications is far from exhausted and it certainly raises a number of issues, not the least of which is the notion of Balkan nation-state building processes and various emerging forms of nationalisms. In this somewhat cursory survey, I have focused primarily on the gradual change of mentality with respect to time variants (backwardness and delay) and space (Balkans vs. Europe) within a specific historical social stratum (Bulgarian intellectual migrant elite) and how such change has influenced this group’s responses to the cultural construction of ambiguous Balkan spaces and split identities. I believe that such an inquiry can prove illuminating for our understanding of the ways in which Balkan intellectual expatriates today mobilize historical knowledge, experiences, and worldviews in the construction and reimagining of (trans)national literatures, spaces, and identity.

In this regard, the choice of the writers I discuss in this project is not coincidental; yet, it can certainly be expanded. Like Wladimir Kaminer, Dimitre Dinev and Rumjana Zacharieva are writers, whose generations carry, on the one hand, the intellectual heritage of communist cultures. On the other hand, their fiction conveys the authors’ critical engagement with the

burden of Balkan discursive geography imposed on them by previously formed exclusionary spaces and identities. To reiterate: in the Balkan context, uncertainty, ambiguity, marginality, and borderline conditions have become major constitutive factors in the phantasmatic framework for the Balkan estranged subjectivity and they curiously figure as central elements in the theoretical work of Julia Kristeva. Kristeva's personal Balkan story and attitude towards her original culture have (unfortunately or not) rarely been associated as an important factor in her theoretical concerns with displacement, negation, abjection, or the "other within." Rather, Kristeva's voyages of intellectual discoveries (via Lacan, Freud, and Barthes) of disciplinary, linguistic, literary, and cultural estrangements and experiences of foreignness have put her at the center of scholarly attention, thereby granting her an indisputable status as a female intellectual and theorist in contemporary Western thought.

In many ways, Kristeva's theoretical work can be understood as symptomatic of contemporary criticism's attempts to grasp a postindustrial, postmodern world, from which, as Ernesto Laclau writes, "the universal subject spoke" and into which new forms of identities, multiplicity of experiences and realities have poured as a result of the profound social and political changes that have been taking place globally since the 1960s ("Universalism, Particularism, and the Question of Identity" 361). With her critical readings of the revolutionary power of poetic language and the feminine to expose structures of discontinuity and ruptures and of the maternal semiotic as the nourishing archaic, Kristeva's theoretical oeuvre stands, according to Anna Smith, for the "universally alienated quality of existence" (5) further captured in such concepts like the "subject in process" and "borrowed dwellings [...] outside the self in itself" (*Julia Kristeva: Readings of Exile* 40). It has thus been the spaces at the intersection between psychoanalysis and literature (most notably in the works of Mallarmé, Céline, and

Proust), which have granted Kristeva access to the limits of modern subjectivity, allowing her to theorize the most intimate and defamiliarizing sensations of life and death: the aporia of maternal love (jouissance), the catharsis of horror, the destructivity of cultural and social malaise, and the unhomely space of abjection.

But it is with her focus on the subjective and the political aspect of Otherness that Kristeva's theories of exile and displacement broaden the conceptual basis for exploring the experience of migration and the notion of estrangement in Balkan fictional narratives of dislocation. In many ways, the writers' literary oeuvres bare similarities with Kristeva's scholarly oeuvre, reverberating many of the concepts and ideas advanced in her works. For instance, I demonstrate in my textual analysis of Rumjana Zacharieva's *Bärenfell* (*Bearskin* 1999) that as the author becomes involved in acts of translating, transmitting, and recreating histories, memories, and wor(l)ds, her narrative both makes and unmakes the divides between the East and the West of Europe, past and present, and languages and peoples. In so doing, Zacharieva's novel offers a perceptive account (in the spirit of Kristeva) of the human cost of estrangement (and of the recognition of Otherness) brought about by the uncertainty of exile and imminent fragmentation. As Kristeva argues in her book *Strangers to Ourselves* (1994), the discovery of our own subjectivity becomes only then possible when modern subjects face the contradictory process of identity/difference renegotiations; a process that, although expressed in a kind of aporia between identity and difference, the familiar and the foreign, love and hatred, life and death, ultimately leads to the acceptance and reconciliation of one's own foreignness, one's own differentness, instead of its inherent repression. As my discussion of Kristeva's condemnation of and disidentification with her maternal culture and Balkan origins demonstrated, the Balkanite Kristeva seems to have remained foreign to the cosmopolitan theory

that her French intellectual self had composed. Rumjana Zacharieva's semi-autobiographical novel *Bärenfell*, by contrast, illustrates the ability of finding more successful (but also distressing) ways of decoding and encoding the memory and experience of the old Balkan/Bulgarian world into the experience and reality of the Western/German world, and, to paraphrase Kristeva, of "grafting the old language onto the body" and "syntax" of the new one, of reconnecting with the Other (also within) ("*Interview: The Old Man and the Wolves*" 169). An inherently self-estranging activity, this process of knowing the Other is aesthetically captured in the novel as an inner conflict (imaged in the metaphor of the *she-bear*) between two selves, two cultures and languages, and finally two (geographic) hemispheres.

In conclusion, allow me to note that the gist of Zacharieva and Dinev's narratives of identity, self, Otherness, and origin has also been to force on us an awareness of the lasting measure of stigma that is historically and socioculturally specific. Consequently, the stories these authors tell about those invisible and unknown Balkanites, "culturally constructed as 'the other within,'" upset the aesthetic and methodological convenience of the works' formal similarities with other transnational writings in German promoted by models of hybridity, migration, and imaginary binaries and offer new challenges to literary critics (Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* 188). These challenges, as Dinev's historically-inflected writings exemplify, are closely connected with the fact that literature of and about Balkan and Eastern European migration need to be understood beyond terms of resistance to historical processes of disruption and loss. Rather, as LaCapra's study on trauma in *History in Transit* (2004) suggests, these works must be read in their affective and experiential dimensions, within which the stigmatization of a community as a consequence of its traumatic past is staged and worked through, critically and empathically (42-43). In Dinev, the disempowerment, the loss, the disavowal, the insecurity, the vulnerability, the

absence that his characters undergo point to stigmatic experiences that stem not only from migration, exclusion, and displacement but also from living in Europe's spectral region whose semi-colonial past and transitional present are traumatized with political controversy, ethnic conflicts, economic instability, fear and mistrust. Greater attention to the element of trauma in its various manifestations can give us a better understanding of the ways in which literature thematizes the ways in which stigmatized individuals cope with stigma.

Like stigma, trauma is identity-bound. On the one hand, trauma can form the foundation for an identity that is both personal and collective, as with the French Revolution, the Vietnam War, the Kosovo war, and last but not least, the Holocaust (LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* 162). On the other, as LaCapra observes, it is important that we look at trauma not only as a founding condition for identity but as a process that "rais[es] the question of identity" (162). Here, LaCapra refers to the contemporary functioning of the Holocaust. Introducing the term "the negative myth of origins," LaCapra draws attention to the instances when the Holocaust is not used as an event that brings to our attention political and ethical questions of a serious nature but is assimilated as a "redemptive narrative" that rationalizes certain political and ideological decisions (that are otherwise not justified so easily on other grounds) or offers a basis for an identity that is in one aspect or another not totally justified by the current situation (162-163). In a similar vein, Balkan states have continuously used the victimhood-narrative of Ottoman oppression as an ideological weapon in their efforts to create a distinct national identity unblemished by the Ottoman influence while simultaneously excusing their countries' delay in economic, political, and social development as the heritage of Ottoman, and later Soviet, rules. Such views largely permeated public discourses and collective memory in the Balkans, turning at once a traumatic history into a stigma (representational, emotional, etc.) that has functioned as a



part of the construction of identities. My discussion in this chapter demonstrates how the presence of Balkan countries' devaluation of their never fully achieved *Europeanness as the norm*, despite their geographic belonging to the European whole, continues to shape both historical consciousness and the self-colonizing gesture of Balkan/Bulgarian identity from within. The paradox here lies in the impression of the inability of Balkan subjects to come to terms with their stigma, which triggers a perpetual return of the repressed in memory, behavior, and different historical symptoms. But if this is so, then we are faced with a rather pessimistic view of the Balkan subject doomed to play the sinister internal Other of Europe. One way of breaking this logic would be, as Alexander Kiossev speculates, to look at constitutive trauma:

as a reminder that the history of Modernity could not be written as a composite history consisting of the histories of many separate nations (that means as histories of the Native and the Alien), but should be written (described, analyzed, criticized, etc.) globally, as a history of the entire process of asymmetrical modernization, transgressing the boundaries of the established historiographical narratives about states, cultures and ideologies. ("Notes on Self-Colonizing Cultures" 116)

In light of LaCapra and Kiossev's observations, I strive in my textual analysis to remain attuned to the emotional, experiential, and historical depth of fictional narratives, while attending to the regulative ideas and criteria that render such writings transnational. In this regard, an elaboration of how literary representations of trauma, like Dinev's, bear out the specificities of past events and their reverberation in history, memory, and impaired collective identity may further enable us to address and rethink, more finely and cogently, the Janus-faced nature of modern Balkan identity (holding both good and bad and looking towards its past and future) and envision, albeit

provisionally, different versions of Balkan subject positions and identifications in the transnational context of Europe.

### **3.0 BALKAN STORIES, MIGRANT REALITIES. RECONFIGURING SOUTHEASTERN EUROPEAN IDENTITIES UNDER GLOBAL CONDITIONS: THE CASE OF DIMITRE DINEV**

Dimitre Dinev is a contemporary Bulgarian-born Austrian author, who writes in German—his acquired-in-migration language—and whose fictional depictions of migrant and worker realities continue the literary discourse on labor migration from East to West; a trend set by his predecessors—the representatives of *Gastarbeiterliteratur*. In so doing, Dinev partially inscribes himself in the discourse on hybrid identities. However, as the current chapter demonstrates, Dinev adds a distinctive perspective in his narrative negotiations of the experience of westward migration and the particular relations of domination out of which histories, geographies, identities, and cultures are produced and narrated. A close reading of selected but exemplary texts by Dinev illustrates the manifold ways in which his Balkan migrant tales address the specific nature of Southeastern Europe's historical and political development as his fiction negotiates, sometimes obliquely, a long European history of imperial rule that spans from the Byzantine and the Ottoman to the Soviet Empires. The historical and material realities touched upon in his works are an important point that, in my opinion, has been overlooked by recent criticism but is a constituent element of the transnational story, a point that raises many problems, including issues of domination, trauma, memory, and last but not least, the significance of the legacies of empires on the formation of Eastern European identities. My analysis of Dinev's oeuvre presented in this chapter addresses such methodological questions.

More specifically, it is my contention that issues of trauma, memory, and the role of imperial legacies can be effectively addressed if we systematically pay attention to the discourses that surround distinct countries and regions of the European East as “the Other within” and how these discourses impart peculiarities and particularities (i.e., asymmetries of power) that have as much to do with the culture of origin (periphery) as that of the host (center).

This chapter thus draws attention to the current particular bipolar demarcation of Balkan imaginary identities in the West and at home. Political scientist Iver Neumann remarks in his book *Uses of the Other: The East in European Identity Formation* (1999) that when it comes to the representation of the Russian Other, we are confronted with an Otherness that has less to do with a “historical centrality” in the formation of European identity as is the case with “the Turk,” but with its current significance (65). Neumann’s observation also aptly holds true for Europe’s East within—the Balkans that, along with the rubric of Eastern Europe and Russia, have been repeatedly invoked in recent political and social debates on EU expansion, European security, and economic developments (65). It remains perplexing, however, that at the very moment when Balkan countries are feverishly restructuring themselves to take their long-cherished place in a more just and harmonious Europe, the number of informed and sensitive accounts of the Balkan nations’ response to and representation of current European transformations is relatively low. It is still all too common to find Balkan peoples portrayed as the embodiment of European fears, which German writer Thomas Mann had already described in *Der Zauberberg* (*The Magic Mountain*) 87 years ago. Austrian journalist, Thomas Frahm, whose comments reflect existing attitudes towards the Balkans, writes in 2005:

Trotz mancher offenen Frage: Die Osterweiterung der Europäischen Union ist beschlossene Sache. Aber die Ängste des Westens sind groß. [...] Seit einigen

Jahren fließen diese Ängste in den Begriff der Re-Balkanisierung. Damit ist gemeint, daß sich nach der Auflösung der inzwischen vergleichsweise als Ordnungsmacht empfundenen Staatssozialisten wieder Schlendrian, Korruption und Schicksalsergebenheit in einem Maß breit machten, daß wir beim Wort ‘Balkan’ sofort wieder an ‘Pulverfaß’ denken. (“Wirklichkeit ist Vereinbarungssache” 6)

Despite some open issues: The East expansion of the European Union is a done deal. Yet, the fears of the West are big [...]. For some years these fears have been pouring into the concept of re-balkanization. This means that after the liquidation of the state socialists, who have meanwhile come to be seen as a regulatory power, forces of corruption and fatality will spread out again to such an extent that when we hear the word “Balkan” we will immediately think of a “powder keg.”

It is against the backdrop of a resurgence of such age-old European antagonisms that the literature of Balkan writers gains importance in studying the culture of the Other. As writings produced “outside the nation,” to borrow Azade Seyhan’s famous book title, Balkan narratives such as Dinev’s engage the concepts and demarcations that inform European collective imaginations and illuminate the role borders play as key identifiers of identity and self-respect. In this chapter, I then take up the challenge of exploring these discursive strategies in the German-language works of this writer by focusing on the imaginary and transcultural meetings of acts of identification with and disidentification from nation, ethnicity, and language as reconfigurations of the self/other and East/West nexuses. Situated in an unstable field of competing, convergent, and divergent identity models, Dinev’s fictional characters, I argue,

articulate a particular kind of Balkan identity reformation under the auspices of a long tradition of Orientalism and Balkanism.

By examining the themes, motives, and aesthetic strategies employed by Dinev, the chapter maps the narrative negotiation of the experience of migration from the Southeast of Europe to its Western centers in an attempt to evaluate whether an overarching narrative paradigm emerges. I begin with a discussion of Dimitre Dinev's positionality with respect to his writings and the reception of his works in Germany, Austria, and Bulgaria in order to situate his literary production within the contemporary public and academic discourses on migration and literature in these countries and identify further issues that Dinev's oeuvre addresses. Some of these issues concern the trope of migration—displacement, language shifts, identity search, belonging, in-betweenness, and exclusion; and others concern the construction and handling of individual and collective memory and a nation's traumatic past in the transnational context of writing. In addition, I demonstrate how the established theoretical frameworks of colonial/postcolonial studies or of minority/migrant literature regarding issues of hybridity and liminality need to be rethought and modified in light of the East Side story of migration Dinev tells. I then trace in my textual analysis the ways in which Western and Balkanist practices of othering are conceptualized and employed. I incorporate Maria Todorova's discourse on Balkanism and Dominick LaCapra's study on trauma into the investigation of the Bulgarian imaginary as a mode of understanding the Other, exemplified in a selection of short stories from Dinev's story cycles *Die Inschrift* (*The Inscription* 2001) and *Ein Licht über dem Kopf* (*A Light Above the Head* 2005).

In terms of methodological orientation, this chapter continues the discussion of hybridity (mixing, creolization, or contamination) as an exploration of emerging identities and cultures in

literature produced across linguistic, cultural, national, and geographic borders. In one respect, Dimitre Dinev's fiction echoes Kwame Anthony Appiah's thought that all cultures are, in one way or another, shaped by each other and ultimately the product of "contamination," (i.e., cosmopolitan). This observation raises, however, the following questions: How do power, institutions, and ideologies of dominance and crisis turn at different points in time this cosmopolitan universality into a hierarchy of "hyphenated" Others: Turks, Russians, Poles, Serbs, Bulgarians, Chinese, Japanese, etc? And what is the particular role of local loyalties and nationalisms in the dynamics of such global cosmopolitanisms? In light of these questions, Dinev's oeuvre suggests that we ought to exercise greater caution in our application of hybridity and in-betweenness— notions that developed in the context of Southeast Asian, African, and Middle Eastern postcolonialisms—to literary works that stem from a different set of historical and material realities. I am particularly interested in assessing the validity of such conceptions for the fiction output from other geo-strategically liminal regions such as the Balkans. As we will see in Chapter 5 of this dissertation, literary criticism on Wladimir Kaminer has demonstrated that his oeuvre falls within the parameters of established scholarly approaches, especially of theories on hybridity and performativity as developed by postcolonial theorists like Homi Bhabha. Yet when grouped into like categories with Kaminer, Dinev's work points, in fact, to the limitations of the above mentioned analytic terms and theories because Dinev's writing arises not only from a different migratory experience but also from a different historical and geopolitical context. Unlike Kaminer, who arrived as part of the fifth wave of Russian-Jewish immigration to Germany and was granted stable status as a legal resident alien from the beginning, Dinev entered Austria as a refugee and his first decade in the West was marked by inherent insecurity as an undocumented alien. In addition, as already outlined in the second

chapter, we recall that Balkan identity formations are characterized by ambiguity and fragmentation, two aspects that have been conditioned not only by Western Balkanism's othering practices but also the region's semi-colonial history and peripheral geography. To reiterate, as the Bulgarian-American scholar Maria Todorova remarks in her seminal book *Imagining the Balkans* (1997), the self-fashioning of the Balkan nations has one common feature that has been bitterly construed throughout the centuries as "an abnormal condition" or "a stigma" (58). That is, Balkan peoples have persistently looked at themselves and their countries as being in a "state of transition, complexity, mixture, ambiguity" (58). Writer Dimitre Dinev reenacts symbolically and aesthetically these historical manifestations of Balkan ambivalence articulated throughout the centuries in various discourses. Adrian Otoiu correctly observes that Todorova reads this transition as both a spatial and temporal in-betweenness ("An Exercise in Fictional Liminality" 92). As a broad geographic area, the Balkans have for centuries been a crossroads of different religions, peoples, cultures, and political systems, a bridge that both connects and divides West and East, Christendom and Islam. With respect to its temporal dimensions, Todorova conceptualizes the transition as "a bridge between stages of growth," where Balkan peoples seem to be in a limbo, appearing as "backward, semi-colonial, semi-civilized, semi-oriental" (*Imagining the Balkans* 16). She masterfully elucidates that while Orientalism is a way of confronting the Other, Balkanism engages with being "the incomplete self" (18) because it is not a discourse of opposition and antagonism (i.e., East versus West), but one that "treats [...] differences within one type" (19). The Balkan self is thus a self that is neither fully Oriental, nor altogether Western, caught in its spasmodic desire for and in constant frustration with its never fully achieved Europeanness.



My contention is that postcolonial concepts of hybridity and liminality as ideologically and empowering normative categories become impossibly positive and frankly naïve in the context of writings by Balkan writers, whose liminal condition is already doubled by the Balkans' own liminal status. Relocating hybridity and "Third Space" in the historically shaped political and social relations, in which narratives of nations and identity unfold, shows that hybridity and in-betweenness can, in fact, invest the imaginary of physical spaces and people with stigmatizing rather than positive characteristics (Milevska 185; Kiossev, "The Dark Intimacy" 172-3). Migration multiplies such negations and when viewed in this context, hybridity emerges as a particular configuration of successive East and West binaries and is produced by oppositions that suspend the subject in a hierarchy of identities, where the Balkans appear tantamount to their Ottoman and communist legacy and are constantly trumped by a predilection for what is more Western. Consequently, what this chapter attempts is to convey a new kind of approach that sensitizes us to the sociopolitical formations and experiential modalities of places, histories, and traumatic events that literary expressions of Balkan diaspora problematize and mediate.

Sociologist Avtar Brah's discussion of the internal dynamics informing diasporic cultures offers a further point of reference in that respect. In *Cartographies of Diaspora* (1996), Brah draws attention to the fact that diasporas as distinct historical formations are embedded within a "multi-axial understanding of power" (189). She argues that "[a] multi-axial performative conception of power highlights the ways in which a group constituted as a 'minority' along one dimension of differentiation may be constructed as a 'majority' along another" (189). Her conclusion is that:

‘minorities’ are positioned in relation not only to ‘majorities’ but also with respect to one another and vice versa. Moreover, individual subjects may occupy ‘minority’ and ‘majority’ positions simultaneously, and this has important implications for the formation of subjectivity. (189)

Brah further suggests that where multiple diasporas intermingle (e.g., Jewish, African, and I would add, Italian, Russian, Bulgarian, Turkish, Greek, etc.), we are advised to interrogate the similarities and differences in their constructedness not only in reference to the host society, but also in relation to one another (189). Being the heir not only to the communist socialist legacy but also to ancient and multiethnic cultures, Bulgaria, as a part of the Balkans, has been the target of Western European othering practices in a way similar to the case of Turkey and Russia. But the links between the Balkans, the West, and East cannot be solely conceptualized within the Western discourse of othering and exclusion. The five centuries of Ottoman imperial rule on the Balkans exemplify the centuries-old link between Turkey, the Balkans, and other Central European countries, a link that has been reconfigured multiple times through Western, Central European, and Balkan prisms. Given the specificities of the glorious Soviet empire, Russia/the Soviets and Bulgaria participate in yet another interesting and important constellation of colonization practices with Russia playing the “older, bigger brother” to the Balkan countries. Following Brah’s discussion of Chinese and Japanese diasporas in the US, we can say that Eastern European diasporas become, in a similar vein, the carriers of such entwined transnational histories reproduced in the experience of the Cold War, the specificities of migration, and in the crucial moment of the EU’s expansion, where the Balkan cultures acquire, though in oftentimes contradictory ways, an important place in the world’s “global social order” (190).

Brah's illuminations of the relational multilocality of contemporary diaspora, "in which different historical and contemporary elements are understood not in tandem, but in their diachronic relationality" (190) are worth remembering in the context of Dinev's Balkan tales of migration. Interrogating issues of historical agenda and shifting identities, hybridity and marginality, the chapter highlights the ways in which Dinev's narratives engage thematically and aesthetically the plethora of modalities (e.g., labor insecurity, social vulnerability and exclusion, strategies of survival and cultural anxieties, etc.) in which Balkan migrant lives are entangled.

### **3.1 DIMITRE DINEV—FROM A BULGARIAN ASYLUM SEEKER TO A SUCCESSFUL AUSTRIAN WRITER**

Born in Bulgaria's second largest city of Plovdiv in 1968, Dimitre Dinev fled to Austria in 1990, shortly after the collapse of communism, and has lived and worked in Vienna ever since. Like many other contemporary Austrian writers of Balkan background, Dinev's path was marked by the whimsies of the migrant's fate. The first months that the homeless Dinev spent in the refugee camp Traiskirchen near Vienna were followed by years of insecurity, during which the twenty-three-year-old Dinev made a living performing casual jobs as a waiter, a checkroom attendant, and a gilder while studying Philosophy and Russian Philology. This was also the time, however, when out of his precarious position as a refugee and a migrant, Dinev emerged as a skilled novelist and a gifted storyteller; a literary virtuoso, for whom living on the outskirts of society in a constant state of border crossing, be that political, cultural, geographic, or linguistic, has opened a great aesthetic and poetic potential. Writing mainly in German for primarily German audiences, the writer has found a unique way of leading his readers into the world of his Balkan

characters. Whether in short story collections such as *The Inschrift* (*The Inscription* 2001) and *Ein Licht über dem Kopf* (*A Light above the Head* 2005), in novels like *Engelszungen* (*Angels' Tongues* 2003), or in theater plays like *Himmel und Haut* (*Skin and Sky* 2007) and *Eine heikle Sache, die Seele* (*A Tricky Thing, the Soul* 2008), his protagonists embark on journeys through love and death, happiness and sorrow, perseverance and exclusion; journeys set against the backdrop of the solitude of westward migration plagued by the fear of deportation, the struggle for everyday survival, and the uncertainty of the future. More than other migrant writers, Dinev has masterfully integrated in his works Bulgarian traditions with mythical elements and magical realism, leading some critics to praise Dinev as the “Bulgarian Garcia Marquez” (Büssem, “L Forum” 4) and one of the most important proponents of the “Generation Lada” (*Neue Züricher Zeitung*).<sup>22</sup>

Today, Dimitre Dinev enjoys a remarkable career in the German-speaking world and is particularly appreciated in his home country. In Austria and Germany, Dinev's larger-than-life tales have won him prestigious awards such as “Writing between Cultures” from the Austrian *Verein Exil* in 2000 for his short story “Boshidar” and the Adalbert von Chamisso promotion prize of the Robert Bosch Stiftung in 2005 for his debut novel *Engelszungen*. Along with the works of Ernst Jandl (2005), Peter Sloterdijk (2005), Arnold Stadler (2009), and Peter Handke (2008), Dinev's literary profile has frequently appeared (2003, 2004, and 2005) on the title pages of *Volltext*, the prominent Austrian newspaper for contemporary literature. In 2007, Dinev's novel *Engelszungen* became a bestseller in Austria, ranking tenth out of the top 15 books under

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<sup>22</sup> Known as the “Generation Golf” in the Bundesrepublik, the “Generation Lada” refers to that generation of young Bulgarians (born between 1965 and 1975) who grew up during communism and experienced the ubiquitous crisis brought about by the end of the Cold War. The sign of the most widely used car in the communist East, that of the Lada, became a symbol for these young people who are now the most active participants in the ongoing social, political, and economic changes in the country.

the category “Taschenbuch” (“paper back”) in the *Schwarzer-Bestsellerlisten Österreich* (*Schwarzer Bestseller Lists of Austria*) (Dokumentationsstelle für neuere österreichische Literatur, Wien, Zeitungsarchiv). Dinev’s works have not only attracted the attention of literary critics and the general public, but also gained a reputation with passionate readers and political figures like the Austrian chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer. In an interview, chancellor Gusenbauer compares Dinev’s work to that of Samuel Beckett and praises the writer’s masterful use of the German language in his novel.<sup>23</sup> As a playwright, Dinev occupies a special place among Austrian dramatuges. Dinev’s theater plays have been staged numerous times at the Viennese Volkstheater and the Salzburger Festspiele. In 2007, his play *Das Haus des Richters* (*The House of the Judge*) premiered at the prestigious Burgtheater in Vienna, where it was received with acclaim. A number of favorable reviews in both the Austrian and German press have followed in the past five years. Of Dinev’s art, Austrian critics and public alike have spoken highly, commending the writer’s “ungemein frische Lust am Erzählen” (“immensely fresh desire for story telling”) (Hörisch 2) as well his almost uncanny ability to combine not only “Depression und Komik, [...] Schrecken und Schönheit,” but above all “verschiedene Lebensgeschichten” (“depression and comic, [...] terror and beauty [...] different life stories”) (Krause 2).

In the context of Austrian literary criticism, Dinev’s oeuvre (as well as that of other migrant writers) has been considered mostly as a newer literary trend—im/migrant literature—that positions contemporary Austrian literature “at the edge” of the third millennium. Critics have focused on the works’ thematic and stylistic preoccupation with other sociocultural spaces and transcultural constellations, thereby underscoring the border-crossing nature of his writing. At the same time, however, writers have spoken against the use of “im/migrant literature,” as the

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<sup>23</sup> In addition, Dinev is one of the Austrian chancellor’s few esteemed guests to have been honored to share Gusenbauer’s ball loge at an opera performance (“Was ich lese und was nicht”).

conference in Brussels “Immigrant Literature: Writing in Adopted Languages” (2008) ascertained. Although the term tries to appreciate more fully the particularities of this type of literary output, which is reflected in the Chamisso prize, it seems to be too limiting and stigmatizing because it continues to locate this literature at the periphery, somewhere between acceptance and exclusion (Spoerri 2008). This attitude is also discernable in the response of the writer Dinev to a question I asked him during a 2009 interview I conducted with him in Vienna:

**BD:** Wenn Sie an Schriftsteller aus Ihrer Generation denken, (und hier spreche ich nicht von Nationalität), entdecken Sie eine spezifische Konstellation von Autoren, von Zeitgenossen, zu denen Sie Ihrer Meinung nach gehören würden?

**DD:** Ich lese schon immer wieder Beiträge von Gegenwartsautoren, aber ich sehe mich nicht in so eine Gruppe. Da brauche ich nichts tun. Ich bin sofort in eine Schublade selber von der Rezeption eingeteilt. Plötzlich muss ich mich dagegen wehren. Auch der Chamisso-Preis ist auch etwas negatives, da bist du sofort ein Teil von den Tschuschen. Für mich wird sich etwas fundamental ändern, wenn ein Chamisso-Preisträger eines Tages den Büchner-Preis gewinnt. Dann wird sich was ändern, auch macht- und rezeptionsmässig. (Personal Interview)

**BD:** When you think of writers from your generation (and here I do not have any nationality in mind), do you find a specific constellation of contemporary authors, to which, in your opinion, you belong?

**DD:** I read contributions from contemporary writers on and off, but I do not see myself as belonging to a certain group. I do not even have to do anything to belong to one. I am immediately being categorized as such by the reception. Suddenly I have to defend myself against it. The Chamisso prize is also

something negative: at once you become a part of the “Tschuschen” (Viennese pejorative word for people from the Balkans). For me, things will change fundamentally only when a Chamisso prize winner receives the Büchner prize one day. Only then will something change in terms of power relations and critical reception.

Dinev’s words point to a problem grounded in forms of binary thinking still prevalent today. At the core of such binary forms of thought, (despite critics’ good intentions) migration continues to be perceived as an exceptional condition of our age instead of, according to Dinev, as a condition of human existence. “Ohne Migration wäre vielleicht die Welt ausgestorben” (“Without migration, the world would have died out already”), Dinev goes on to say in the interview (Personal Interview). The writer is convinced that “Migration ist nicht etwas, was vor kurzem entstanden ist, sondern Migration hat unsere ganze kulturelle Entwicklung beeinflusst. Ich glaube, dass es ohne Migration keine Kultur gegeben hätte” (“Migration is not something that has emerged only recently. Rather, migration has influenced our entire cultural development. I believe that without migration, we would not have had culture.”) (Personal Interview). Dinev’s endorsement of migration as foundational for all cultures, as opposed to current perceptions of migration as a threat to the coherence of national literatures and identities, underlies much of the thematic preoccupation of his fiction. In this context, the Chamisso-prize can be regarded, following Dinev, as counterproductive because it reinforces the im/migrant label and the non-nativeness of the writer, thereby undermining the value that this fiction adds to a literature otherwise defined by national and linguistic borders.

The status of migrant writers and their works is no less controversial in their home countries. With respect to other Bulgarian authors writing in different languages, debates center

on the question as to whether their literature can be seen as a part of the national Bulgarian literary canon. To be clear, such questions are understandable in the Bulgarian context and this has to do with the tradition informing the reception of Bulgarian literature produced abroad. As Nikolai Aretov describes the process, in the history of Bulgarian emigration in the last century and a half, there have been a number of established Bulgarian writers who, in times of crises, left their country, voluntarily or for political reasons, and continued writing in emigration (“Bulgarian Émigrés and Their Literature” 66-67). As a rule, their works were written in Bulgarian and treated topics specific to Bulgaria. The writers’ linguistic affiliation was, of course, *the* major factor for the inclusion of their books into the Bulgarian literary heritage. Exemplary in this sense is Ivan Vazov, who fled from Bulgaria shortly after Bulgaria’s liberation from the Ottoman rule and whose historical novel about the Ottoman oppression of the Bulgarian lands, *Под Игото* (*Under the Yoke* 1893), became obligatory reading for all Bulgarians. From the second generation of émigrés, those who resided in Western Europe after World War I, and in particular in Germany, I would like to mention the name Kiril Hristov. In his migrant novel *Бели Дяволи* (*White Demons* 1926), he introduces a personalized and critical depiction of both German and Bulgarian societies of the time. His book was censored during the communist regime.

The examples are numerous,<sup>24</sup> but I will return now to the last wave of emigrants, to which Dinev belongs. In fact, opinions are divided as to whether his literature can be classified

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<sup>24</sup> For more information on Bulgarian émigré writers and their cultural and political activities abroad, see my discussion of the history of migration from the Balkans to Europe in Chapter 2 in this dissertation. At this point, I would like to add only the names of Georgi Markov, Tsvetan Todorov, and Julia Kristeva. Of the three, Georgi Markov is best-known among Bulgarians. He fled Bulgaria for political reasons in the late 1960s. In London, Markov was actively involved in Western radio stations that were forbidden in communist Bulgaria such as BBC, Radio Free Europe, and others, and was assassinated in the late 1970s. Markov’s works (plays and novels)



as Bulgarian since it is written and published in German, and its author is an Austrian citizen. This concern became more pronounced when Dinev was nominated for the prestigious Bulgarian theater award “Askeer” in 2007, the highest recognition for a Bulgarian artist, actor, or writer. Dinev’s acceptance of the honor led to the withdrawal of another established Bulgarian playwright from the competition (Aretov 79).

Controversy aside, Dinev’s literature has been met with great interest by Bulgarian-speaking readers at home and abroad, and his novel, several of his plays, and short story collections have now been translated into Bulgarian. What is even more important, though, is the emerging tendency among Bulgarian German scholars to view his work, most notably his novel *Engelszungen*, along with Ilija Trojanow’s *Die Welt ist groß und Rettung lauert überall* (*The World is Big and Salvation Lurks Around the Corner* 1996), *Hundezeiten* (*Dog Days* 1999), and *Der entfesselte Globus* (*The Unchained Globe* 2008), as works that blaze a new path in the workings of Bulgarian memory culture and the Bulgarians’ coming to terms with their communist past. Using the discourse of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in postwar Germany to gain perspective on the politics of memory in Bulgaria, the well-known Bulgarian Germanist, Penka Angelova, argues in her article “The Other Road” that neither in the public nor in the cultural spheres in the country has there been an attempt made to make sense of the atrocities of the communist system thus far (85-86). What is present instead is a reversal of the “perpetrator-victim paradigm” into a “criminal-victim paradigm” (86). In the period after the changes, Angelova continues, former communist members and leaders managed to create mafias and

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belong now to the heritage of Bulgarian dissident literature written during the Cold War in the West and his assassination has been the subject of numerous studies and fictional books. Todorov and Kristeva moved to Paris in the 60s, but their emigration was motivated by education. Both theorists are high caliber scholars in the Western academy and their contributions to the fields of literary theory, philosophy, psychoanalysis, and gender studies are now gradually being acknowledged among Bulgarian scholars as well.

thereby remain in an establishment whose web continues to silence and make invisible the victims of the regime (86). Of the social iniquity and widespread corruption at home, little was known in or revealed to the West. What the Bulgarian state establishment offered, instead, was an exaggerated positive image of the country, a tactic reminiscent of the communist party's attempts to ban everything and everybody that could, in any way possible, discredit the country's international reputation (Ditchev, "The Eros of Identity" 244). In Dinev and Trojanow's critical engagement with Bulgarian realities (of exposing both the good and bad sides of society), Angelova sees therefore the emerging buds of opposition as these authors' literature seeks to create "its own language" and memory work that is a major prerogative for the emergence of a "new conceptual system" (86).

In general, Dinev's six-hundred-page novel *Engelszungen* has attracted the most attention among critics. As Dinev states in one of his interviews with Peter Stuiber, he wanted to write a novel that depicts the Eastern and the Western faces of present-day Europe: "Eine Gegenwart von endlosen Aufbrüchen und Ankünften und Grenzen, wohin man nur schaut. Eine Gegenwart, in der es längst nichts mehr Fremdes gibt außer den Gesetzen selbst, die dauernd Fremdheit und Befremdung produzieren" ("Wherever you look, you see a presence of endless departures and arrivals, and boundaries. A presence where, by far, there is nothing foreign left except those laws that continually create foreignness and estrangement") ("West-östlicher Dinev" 13). Telling the saga of the rise and fall of three generations of two Bulgarian families spanning a century, *Engelszungen* is declared by Stuiber as "ein grandioses, tragikomisches Panorama europäischer Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts" ("a grandiose, tragicomic panorama of 20<sup>th</sup> century European history.") (10). Consequently, literary scholars on both sides of the linguistic divide have found in this novel a fruitful basis for various strands of interpretation.

Austrian critic Hannes Schweiger situates the work in his article “Entgrenzungen. Der bulgarisch-österreichische Autor Dimitre Dinev im Kontext der MigrantenInnenliteratur” (“Border Crossings. The Bulgarian-Austrian Writer Dimitre Dinev in the Context of Migrant Literature”) within postcolonial debates and tackles issues specific to the experience of migration: transgression of boundaries, alienation, hybridity, third space, and in-betweenness. Such literary analysis aims to go beyond the scope of Balkan writings, locating it within the larger field of migrant literature. What remains unsaid or perhaps insufficiently read are these codified moments in Dinev’s narrative that transpose the reader into certain Bulgarian and Balkan topoi (spatial, historical, existential, or linguistic), topoi that have been of greater interest among Bulgarian scholars such as Angelova. Dinev skillfully entwines the family fates of his main protagonists, Svetljo and Iskren—two young immigrants in Vienna—with the fate of a whole people predestined to experience the atrocities of wars, fascism, communism, socialist liberalism, opportunism, and emigration. Interwoven are bits of magic realism: miracle workers, dried-up tongues, would-be saints, guardian angels, sorcerers and gypsy psychics enliven the storyline and rearrange the historical mosaic. With some irony, skepticism, archaism, and superstition thrown into the narrative, the novel imperceptibly takes its reader from the tumultuous years of the Stamboliiski regime, through oppression and conspiracy in totalitarian Bulgaria, into the black hole and silence of post-communist reality. Only in the West then can Dinev’s characters have the chance to see the light of day and learn to speak anew the tongues of men and angels. For Penka Angelova, with his panoramic novel, Dinev has succeeded in creating a psychograph of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Bulgarian society and thus laid the basis for “a completely new tradition and new generation in Bulgarian literature” (87). Both Schweiger’s and Angelova’s discussions illustrate a fact that has been repeatedly overlooked in current criticism: namely that

migrant literature is not only crucial for developing a multicultural and pluralist host society, but it is also potentially transformative in conceptualizations of individual and collective memories and identities at home. What is still needed is an equally informed theoretical and historical approach that can retain a critical awareness of the East-West cross-currents in Balkan literature.

### 3.2 DINEV'S BALKAN STORIES OF MIGRANT REALITIES

Drawing on both Eastern and Western scholarship, I turn now to Dimitre Dinev's short story cycles *Die Inschrift* and *Ein Licht über dem Kopf*. Compared to his novel, his short stories have received considerably less attention, although many of the tales pre-figure and post-figure the narrative pattern of *Engelszungen*, its formulation of characters, historical events, and mythic motifs. As in Dinev's novel, we encounter characters of mixed ethnicity, taxi drivers and construction workers, fortune tellers and horse thieves, whose trajectories crisscross those of Dinev's illegal immigrants and refugees gathered in Vienna from all around the world. The marginalized foreigners and asylum seekers in the story "Spas schläft" ("Spas Sleeps") live, for instance, in the Viennese refugee camp in Traiskirchen or reside as would-be passengers in a derelict train, "der nirgendwohin fuhr" ("that does not go anywhere") (108). And other stories read as ritual-like rites of passages and initiation and metaphorizations of Balkan phantasms. In "Die Handtasche" ("The Purse"), a lady's purse that is made out of the skin of twelve young poets wanders from owner to owner until it restores speech to a mute woman; a jolly wake escalates in "Die Wache" ("The Wake") to a Dionysian bender, where one can no longer tell the living from the dead; and the rise and decline of Lazarus in the eponymous story "Lazarus" ends with his westward flight in a coffin. Betwixt and between life and death, neither alive nor dead

and simultaneously dead and alive, Dinev's characters straddle boundaries between past and present, silence and speech, victims and perpetrators, and East and West and occupy threshold stations in their quests for reinvention in a new time, new place, new culture, and new language.

Yet, Dinev succeeds in producing a type of metanarrative not only about hybrid characters and threshold places but also about discourses that occupy liminal spaces in Western thought such as the discourse of Balkanism. The following few examples from reviews in the Feuilleton section of several major German-language newspapers illustrate how these reviews characterize, deliberately but also unintentionally, Dinev's representations of Balkanist contradictions. The FAZ writes that in Dinev's stories:

[d]ie heimat- und hauslosen Neueuropäer veranstalten an den Toren des alten Europas einen Karneval der Blessuren und Torturen. Sie kommen aus den östlichen, zerschissenen Hintertaschen des Kontinents und passieren, wie der Roma Lazarus, als fröhliche Leichname in Särgen die Schengen-Grenze. ("Im Zweifel für die Reisefreiheit")

[t]he homeless and houseless new Europeans at the gates of old Europe present a carnival of wounds and ordeals. They come from the eastern tattered back pockets of the continent and cross, like the gypsy Lazarus, as joyful corpses in coffins the Schengen border.

Bernhard Fetz from publishing house *Falter* says:

Dinevs Literatur lebt auch vom Balkaneffekt, den verkommenen Szenerien, den lebenslustig-melancholischen Typen, den von unsicheren Zeitläufen gezeichneten Figuren, die irgendwie weitermachen, auch wenn sie alles verloren haben. (Gelobt? Verrissen? Besprochen!)"

Dinev's literature feeds on the Balkan effect, the degenerate sceneries, the fun-loving-melancholic lads, and the characters sketched by the insecure course of history; characters that carry on somehow even if they have lost everything.

And in the newspaper *Westdeutsche Zeitung* one reads:

Vielleicht ist es das große Verdienst der aus Osteuropa stammenden Literaten, die Versehrtheit des Menschen nicht als Makel und Defekt, sondern als Grundbedingung für die Beweglichkeit des Lebens zu erkennen. Den Spagat zwischen Ost und West schaffen jene Schriftsteller scheinbar spielend und humorvoll, die den Sprung zwischen den Welten vollzogen haben.

("Taschenbuch-Tipps im Januar")

Perhaps it is the biggest achievement of the authors from Eastern Europe to perceive human damage not as an imperfection and defect but as a fundamental condition for the mobility of life. Only those writers who have performed the jump between worlds can accomplish the split between East and West in a way that seems playful and humorous.

Characterizations such as "heimat- und hauslose[...] Neueuropäer" ("homeless and houseless new Europeans") in front of "den Toren des alten Europas" ("the gates of old Europe") undoubtedly allude to the Western Enlightenment paradigm, according to which northwestern Europe represents the zenith of progress and civilization, whereas the "new Europeans," (i.e., Balkans) are at the same time included in and excluded from Europe by virtue of being, as "d[ie] östlichen, zerschlissenen Hintertaschen des Kontinents" ("the eastern tattered back pockets of the continent"), at the margins of Europe and in a nadir of development. Defined by the region's "explosive" geographical and temporal in-betweenness rather than by its own identity

characteristics (Goldsworthy, “Invention and In(ter)vention” 25), the Balkan self thus emerges as ontologically “uncertain, fragmented, and transient” (Todorova, *Balkan Identities* 13-15).

This ambiguity of the Balkan subject becomes more pronounced in Fetz’s reference to the Balkan Effect and the depraved and mythologized Balkan sceneries, whose political and historical instability impinges directly on the lives, identities, and bodies of Dinev’s characters. The writer’s inward gaze beholds then his protagonists’ “Versehrtheit” (“spiritual vacuity” or “moral damage”) of which the *Westdeutsche Zeitung* speaks; yet another indication of the “broken” Eastern Europeans. That one need not view this damage as “Makel und Defekt” (“imperfection and defect”) but as “Grundbedingung für die Beweglichkeit des Lebens” (“a fundamental condition for the mobility of life”) suggests in a sense that certain essentialized traits, to which the metaphor of the “Spagat zwischen Ost und West” (“split between East and West”) alludes, are in fact the result of local factors and broader geopolitical processes rather than of ancient antagonisms.

### **3.2.1 Searching for Light—the Balkans’ Ghostly Faces Revealed**

Dinev’s *Ein Licht über dem Kopf*, a collection of ten tragicomic stories, bears the traces of his awareness of a writer coming from “down there” in Europe; an ambivalent position that he appropriates as an unexhausted source for fantasy and virtuosity. Deeply cognizant of the antagonism between East and West and their influence on Balkan self-presentations, Dinev crafts stories about Others, ghostly Balkanites, and invisible Bulgarians, whose longing for transformation and self-fulfillment is ultimately a longing for the West as the perceived “best”

coherent self.<sup>25</sup> Like Dinev, whose life path represents a journey from East to West, from one existence to another, Dinev's characters cross borders between legality and illegality, countries and laws, reality and dream, the experienced and the remembered, and finally, between languages in search of their own light in life.

And to be in search of light suggests that those who quest for it are shrouded in darkness. To the migration and Western Balkanism's developmental paradigms that suggest movement from East to West, from the ghostly Balkans to enlightened Europe, Dinev's short story "Lazarus" enacts the biblical movement from darkness to light and from death to resurrection. In short, "Lazarus" is a story about an outcast, Bulgarian Roma whose journey from the Balkans to Vienna is accomplished through four days and four nights spent in passage in an alien-smuggling operation that exports its "cargo"—Albanians, Bosnians, Romanians, and Bulgarians—in coffins bound for Vienna. The story begins with the slamming of Lazarus' coffin and ends with a loud voice repeating Christ's commandment: "Lazarus, komm heraus!" ("Lazarus, come out!") (92). While the story is finally about his metaphorical rebirth, symbolized by his gradual acclimation to the light in the last paragraph, it primarily recapitulates through the hero's mind the troubled, difficult, and ultimately untenable life Lazarus leads and ultimately leaves in the Balkans. That is, the story recounts a life and identity left in Bulgaria and merely portends the possibilities that a new life and existence in the West represents.

In the course of the story, told in a flashback, we learn that Lazarus' downfall is anchored not so much in his abject and hyper-liminal status as a Roma, born to a Bulgarian father and a Roma mother, but to his being entrapped in a space, the Balkans, whose geopolitical

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<sup>25</sup> As Tzvetan Todorov writes in his chapter on "European values" in *The New World Disorder*, for the Bulgaria of his childhood, Europe enjoyed, "over and above its material advantages, [...] a prestige, a reputation for spiritual superiority [...], of which [Bulgarians] were no less convinced" (61).



impermanence and transitory character are reflected in the protagonist's turbulent life. With the fall of communism and the lack of orientation that enveloped Bulgaria in the 90's, Lazarus turns into a smuggler, a betrayer, and a lover who enters a transgressive space, one associated with criminality and sexuality, vices and values he comes to embrace. In his "Romaness," Lazarus serves as a repository of negative characteristics against which not only Westerners but also Balkanites construct their positive, self-confirming image.

Du stinkender Zigeuner! [...] Der Balkan ist voll von euch! Hätte ich mehr Macht, ich würde schon ordentliches Bürger aus euch machen. Ihr seid nichts als Abschaum! Schmuggler, Diebe und Betrüger. Solche wie du sind schuld daran, daß der Kommunismus keine Chance hatte. (79)

You stinking gypsy! [...] The Balkans are full of you, if I had power I would make proper citizens out of you. You're nothing but scum! Smugglers, thieves, and betrayers, and it's because of you people that communism never had a chance.

The story's cruel Serbian major verbally assails Lazarus while confiscating the goods the latter has smuggled into war-torn Serbia. What we have here is a form of a "nesting Orientalism," a self-stigmatizing process of passing alterity further east, so that the image of the self appears less oriental, less corrupt and thus more Western. Hence, Lazarus embodies, in Kiossev's words, the "Balkan bogeyman," upon whom negative emotions are unloaded and "who once again muddles the clear national borders", for which Lazarus becomes the appropriate conduit in the story ("The Dark Intimacy" 189).

Disowning his Roma mother and betrayed, in turn, by his mistress, Lazarus decides to follow his childhood dream of finding a place to belong, a home, where his identity is not

*necessarily* that of the inescapable Roma, who bears the mark of the Balkans' shameful history, an identity he hopes to lose in exchange for that of a new existence abroad. Such a transformation is only implied in the story's abrupt end, which mirrors the precipitous conclusion to the biblical account. After passing the Austrian border, Lazarus awakes, arises, and like the unbound risen dead, greets life anew.

The nature of our reborn Lazarus' identity is left vague, but it interestingly finds its momentum and purpose reconfigured in the cycle's next story "Spas schläft" ("Spas Sleeps"). "Spas schläft" begins with a description of a thirty-five year old Bulgarian immigrant, Spas, fast asleep, under a poster on a street in Vienna, in the pose of a corpse, with a beer bottle perched in his hands in place of the traditional Orthodox candle. The poster reads "Lebt und arbeitet in Wien" ("Lives and works in Vienna") (93).

The story "Spas schläft" is undoubtedly Dinev's most significant engagement with the paradox of the undocumented worker and the powerlessness of being a non-citizen and refugee, whose individual options of life and home pursuits are affected by the unequal allocation of rights and uneven structuring of career opportunities. At a macro level, "Spas schläft" is a tale about social identities around which social and economic movements have congealed over fifteen years or so, and about the desire for self-metamorphosis in the quest for a more or less coherent self. The migrant self becomes entirely defined by virtue of being employed, ideally, legally: "Wer Arbeit hatte, hatte ein Zuhause" ("Those who had a job had also a home") (97). In the story, sociologist Avtar Brah's words that "[m]etaphors can serve as powerful inscriptions of the effects of political borders" speak the fate of Dinev's refugees and asylum seekers, who, when confronted with tighter immigration controls and unavoidable expulsion from Vienna, turn

into globalization's losers, inscribed into the transgressive space of aliens and Others  
(*Cartographies of Diaspora* 198).

Die Augen der Welt schauten nur auf die Wände. Man schaut nicht hinein. Man  
sperrt nicht auf. Man hat Angst vor Geistern. [...] Die Arbeit war ein Gespenst.  
Sechs Monate sollten reichen, meinte das Gesetz. Danach verfolgte es jeden, der  
noch ohne Arbeit herumspuckte. Ein Exorcist, der meinte, sechs Monate würden  
reichen, um zu beweisen, wer Mensch ist, wer Geist. Die Welt sollte heil bleiben.  
("Spas schläft" 103)

The eyes of the world gazed at the walls, yet people chose to remain blind.  
People do not welcome. They are afraid of ghosts. [...] The job was a phantom.  
Six months should suffice, said the law. After that the law chased those who  
walked around jobless as ghosts. As an exorcist once said, six months would be  
enough to prove who is a human and who is a ghost. The world should remain  
safe.

As the law sunders them apart, the refugees are forced to go underground and into illegality, and  
as phantoms they haunt "the nooks and crannies wherever low-paid work is performed" (Brah  
201). In Dinev, the un-homed subject becomes thus "strangely framed," represented aesthetically  
as a shadow devoid of individuality. The refugees, we read:

befanden sich in einer Welt, in der jeder Fremde auf die Probe gestellt wurde. [...] Sie  
begriffen nur schwer, daß das Gesetz sie selber in Angst verwandelt hatte. Sie  
waren die Ängste der heilen Welt. Aber sie hatten keine Zeit, es zu begreifen. Sie  
mußten Ängste bekämpfen und sie bekämpften einander. (103)

resided in a world where every foreigner was put to the test. [...] For them, it was hard to comprehend that the law had turned them into fear. They were the fears of the enlightened world. But they did not have time to realize this. They had to fight fears and they fought each other.

Such impressions about the bureaucratic practices of exclusion that crush immigrants and their identities acquire Kafkaesque dimensions. Like Franz Kafka's heroes, Dinev's too, to paraphrase André Breton, "pound in vain on the doors of this world," struggling within a play of forces, whose meaning they seem, at first glance, to be unable to unravel (*Anthology of Black Humor* 261). Yet Dinev's third person narrator appears to be less interested in the experience of physical surroundings than in inquiring into how the experiences of modern life with its political aspects of change influence one's sense of being and of place in the world. In an interview, Dinev says:

Macht und Machtverhältnisse interessieren mich sehr. Das Politische ist wichtig in meiner Literatur, aber nicht als treibende Kraft. [...] Ich suche das, was weiter bestehen wird, obwohl die Systeme längst verschwunden sind. Der Mensch schafft sich Systeme, die ihn selbst verändern. ("Das Öffnen des Mundes beim Lachen")

I am interested in power and power relations a lot. The political is important in my literature, but is not the determining force. [...] I search for what remains even when systems are long gone. The human creates systems that in turn change him/her.

Hence, at a micro level, "Spas schläft" seems to suggest that the system of lawful walls and gates is primarily charged with strong national sentiments that evoke the Central-European-Balkanist

imaginary paradigm. So for example, Spas and Ilija come to realize that their Balkan origin is an obstacle to finding a job, and thus achieving clear distinguishability and moral personality:

Zwischen der Herkunft und der Arbeit gab es Zusammenhänge. Spas kam dahinter, daß nur die wenigsten Bulgaren und Rumänen, die er kannte, Arbeit hatten, dafür aber alle Polen. [...] Es war besser ein Pole zu sein. Griechen zu sein, war noch besser, das wußte Spas auch. [...] Er war kein Grieche. Er fand als Pole Arbeit. Ein Pole zu sein, war mehr, als einer Nationalität anzugehören. Ein Pole zu sein, war schon ein Beruf.[...] Am besten war es, ein Österreicher zu sein. (99)

There were connections between one's origin and one's job chances. Spas figured out that only a few of the Bulgarians and the Romanians he knew had a job, yet all the Poles did. [...] It was better to be a Pole. To be a Greek was much better, Spas knew that. [...] He was not a Greek. He found a job as a Pole. To be a Pole was better than to belong to a nation. To be a Pole was already an occupation. [...] But to be an Austrian was best.

And

Er hatte oft keine Arbeit bekommen, weil man meinte, er käme aus der Türkei oder aus Jugoslawien. Und wenn er sagte, er käme aus Bulgarien, dann kriegte er sie nicht, weil er plötzlich als Jude erkannt wurde. Juden konnten von überall kommen. (112)

He rarely got a job because people thought he came from Turkey or Yugoslavia. And when he said he came from Bulgaria he got nowhere because he was suddenly perceived as a Jew. Jews could come from everywhere.

The two quotes map out the symbolic geographical hierarchy of Eastern Europe after 1990 as an unstable field of competing identity models, for which, along with the economic factor, the two orders of Balkanism play essential roles. The first demarcates the Western perceptions of the Balkans “from a micro-colonial perspective” that erases any signs of difference and conflates Otherness (Kiossev 181). Here Bulgarians equal Romanians who equal Turks who equal Yugoslavs who equal Jews.

The second delineates the mirror discourse of the Balkanist self as a series of reflected perceptions and self-perceptions. Standing before the nationalizing gaze, or as Alexander Kiossev writes “the gaze of the ‘Significant Other’” (179), the Balkan refugee, in our case Spas, disidentifies himself with his officially imposed national identity: “Er wäre gern auch ein Pole und ein Grieche und besonders gern Österreicher gewesen” (“He would have preferred to be a Pole and a Greek and especially an Austrian”) (112). What is interesting in the quote above is that this act of disidentification is quite different from Milica Bakić-Hayden’s concept of “nesting Orientalisms” according to which almost every Balkan country subordinates its neighbors as more Eastern and Oriental. Following anthropological research and Michael Taussig’s concept of *intimate social knowledge* understood as “an essentially inarticulable and imageric nondiscursive knowing of social relationality,” I see Dinev’s two characters’ positive ranking of being a Pole as reminiscent of a kind of Balkan nesting Occidentalisms from the socialist period (qtd. in Valtchinova, “Between a ‘Balkan’ Home and the ‘West’” 139). That is, as Valtchinova explains, many Balkan cultures exhibited the tendency not only to Orientalize but also Westernize specific regions of the peninsula according to certain cultural, political and economic features extracted from the complex image of the West (139). Valtchinova states further that this enabled socialist societies to produce alternative qualifications of Wests, to redraw internal borders, and thus to

position themselves according to different categories and hierarchies (139-142). So for example, being economically more developed, in close proximity, and possessing greater likeness to Europe, the Central European countries of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany existed in Bulgarian perceptions as their westernized East European brother and Other (Valtchinova 139-142). In Dinev, this type of unofficial knowledge about East and West, though misty and vague, forms “a reservoir of insights [...] that have an enormous power [...] as a motivational force in the lives” and the imaginary and transcultural acts of dis/identification of his characters (Valtchinova 139).

In their desire to fit into larger schemes of power, that is to live and work in Austria and to belong to its nation, Dinev’s two main characters, Spas and Ilija, are inevitably forced to rediscover the irrelevance of the Balkan and migrant identity and to adopt almost a mythical power of metamorphosis that brings two “incomplete sel[ves]” (Todorova) together:

Ein Bulgare war nur ein Flüchtling, einer unter vielen und unerlöst wie sie alle.  
Ein Bulgare zu sein, war nichts Besonderes. Es war ohne Bedeutung. Spas and Ilija waren zwei Freunde [...] zwei Bulgaren. Zwei Bulgaren bedeutete, mit dem auszukommen, was eine Person braucht. Zwei Bulgaren bedeuteten so viel wie eine Person. (“Spas schläft” 99)

A Bulgarian was just a refugee, one amongst many and unsaved like the rest. To be a Bulgarian was nothing special. It was of no significance. Spas and Ilija were but two friends [...] two Bulgarians. Two Bulgarians meant getting by with as much as one person needs. Two Bulgarians meant as much as one person.

The irony and ambiguity discernable in this quote draw attention to Maria Todorova’s notion of the Balkans’ “transitory character,” their “in-betweenness [that] could have made them simply an

incomplete other; instead they are constructed not as ‘other’ but as an incomplete ‘self’” (*Imagining the Balkans* 18). The geopolitical ambiguity of the Balkan space as always *in* and *out* of Europe becomes a metonym for the construction of the Balkan subject, who “constantly oscillates between internalizing and distancing him or herself from group symbols” (Bjelić 16). Contrary to Homi Bhabha’s conceptualization of the interstice as a space of subversion and resistance to dominant hegemonies and paralyzing boundaries, the quote exemplifies how Bhabha’s notion of interstice is void with respect to the discursive context of Balkanism, as the rhetoric in this example circumvents a positive grammar of self-representation. The characters’ language is inherently Balkanist and traumatizing, as it delineates the main characters’ experience of Selfness as absent and non-true and reveals their self-orientalization in adherence to the hierarchical scheme of nesting Occidentalisms. According to this scheme the protagonists subjugate their Balkanist/Bulgarian origins as the East to other Others in the Western imaginary.

Dinev’s characters, I posit, exhibit identifications and disidentifications with all parties in a negatively charged hybridity, in which the Balkan subject conceals itself with its idealized geographic and cultural preference for the West. This mimicking of everything Western produces what I term ‘a hierarchy of hybridity’ that is tainted by the contingency of Balkan discursive geography. It is a hybridity that does not necessarily negate cultural difference as such, but points to the complexity of identity formations in westward Balkan migration. In Dinev’s context, such dynamic conditions, where various identity models are in competition, seem to have a negative rather than a positive outcome for his characters, as the majority of them remain confined by their fictional liminal worlds, barely able to adapt to life in society.

Here, an interesting remark bears notice. Unlike the life experience of the author Dinev, who succeeded in transforming himself from a refugee and a migrant to an authoritative presence



in Vienna's and Austria's literary and cultural circles, the lives of his characters in his short stories take dramatic turns for the worse. Some of Dinev's figures, like the crisis profiteer Stojan Wetrew in the story "Wechselbäder" ("Alternating Baths"), eventually return home from their vagrancy abroad unable to find themselves anew after their numerous metamorphoses. The story's end is unmerciful. Due to a strange and inexplicable conjunction of circumstances, Stojan ends up in a mental hospital in Sofia, where his supplications remain unheard: "Ich will meine alte Seele zurück. Ich bin kein Italiener, ich heiße Stojan" ("I want my old soul back. I am not an Italian, my name is Stojan") (14). And others, like the construction worker Nikodim Stavrev from the story "Die Wache" ("The Wake"), meet even more tragic ends. Due to the lack of safety procedures and favorable work conditions at a construction site in Vienna, he gets killed by a falling bucket full of mortar.

As is evident in "Spas schläft," "the disappearance of the Balkan subjectivity before the European gaze"(Antić, "The Balkans and *The Other Heading*" 155) opens up a dynamic field of a range of Others, a dialectical exchange that enables the two friends to maneuver between the various identity models and to confront, perform, question, or even reject them. Yet, Dinev's characters lack equilibrium and find themselves suspended in an impossible balancing act, where performing other identities does not help so much as it creates tension. His characters realize they cannot be everyone or everything, but must in the end choose some identity in order to create a more or less coherent self. Inevitably, the Balkan origin is cast aside in favor of a Western presence. Towards the end of the story, for instance, while working as waiters, Spas and Ilija eventually opt for negotiating a self through linguistic taming and domestication as the only means to escape from the stigma of belonging to the dark Balkans, from their "shadowy

existence” (“Schattenexistenz”), or, in Travis Miller’s words “the shadow, the structurally despised alter-ego” of Europe (qtd. in Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* 18).

Sie hatten anfangs Angst, jemandem nach einem Wort zu fragen, denn sie wollten weder das Gefühl erwecken, daß sie die Sprache schlecht verstanden, noch daß sie schlechte Kellner waren. Sie wollten die Arbeit behalten. [...] Spas und Ilija waren gute Kellner. Sie bekamen viel Trinkgeld, weil sie die Wünsche der Kunden erraten konnten, noch bevor diese sie aussprachen. [...] Das Geld, das sie für jeden erratenen Wunsch bekommen hatten, gaben sie aus, um die vielen unverständlichen Worte, aus welchen jeder Wunsch besteht, zu erlernen. Man verlangte nach Kenntnissen und nicht nach Gefühlen. Man prüfte Grammatik und Regeln und nicht übersinnliche Erfahrungen. Denn es prüfte das Gesetz, und es prüfte Menschen und nicht Geister. (“Spas schläft” 109)

At the beginning they were afraid to inquire about a word’s meaning because they didn’t want to arouse suspicion that they understood the language poorly or that they were bad waiters. They wanted to keep their jobs. [...] Spas and Ilija were good waiters. They received a lot of tips because they were able to guess the diners’ wishes even before they had the chance to express them. [...] They spent the money from each guessed wish to learn all the unknowable words that every wish consisted of. Foreigners were required to show competency and not feelings. Foreigners were tested for grammar and rules and not for transcendental experiences. Because it tested the law and it tested people and not ghosts.

The form of denial and the fear of shame and failure discernable in Ilija’s and Spas’s social behavior parallel Thomas Frahm’s remarks about a certain stereotype about Bulgarians abroad.

He says that “Bulgaren, die sich im Ausland treffen, haben etwas von Verlorenen an sich”

(“Bulgarians meeting abroad exhibit something inherently lost”) and continues:

Das liegt daran, daß sie Anpassung bis zur Selbstverleugnung betreiben. Sie bemühen sich nicht nur die Sprache des Gastlandes in fieberhaftem Eifer bis zur Perfektion zu erlernen, sie streben auch in ihrem sozialen Verhalten nach totaler Mimesis. (“Wirklichkeit ist Vereinbarungssache”)

This is because they carry on assimilation to the point of self-denial. They try not only to learn the language of the host land, in a feverish zeal, to perfection, but in their social behavior they strive for a total mimesis.

The tendency towards mimetic self-discipline that Dinev’s characters exhibit arises out of the internalized tension between two universal aspects of national identity formation, as described by Iyaylo Ditchchev in his article “The Eros of Identity,” in most Balkan countries during communism. On the one hand, a contributing factor is the communist governments’ modernization efforts to catch up with Europe, economically, politically, and culturally; a process that was marked by an emulation of Western prototypes (e.g., French and German models of government, literary models, and imaginaries) and the formation of high culture where anything Oriental (corporeal, sensual, amorphous) was stigmatized and expelled (Ditchchev 245). And on the other hand, the traumatic implications of such repression of everything considered shameful in the hopes that “civilized Europe” would acknowledge and be pleased by the country’s efforts to create a stable and uniform Balkan/Eastern European identity (Ditchchev 245-6). In Charles Taylor’s words, Dinev’s characters’ “identity is vulnerable to nonrecognition, [...] there has developed a world public scene, on which [they] see themselves as standing, on which they see themselves as rated, and which rating matters to them” (“Nationalism and Modernity”

236). Such forms of implicit imaginary identifications with things Western (be that language, culture, or consumption *as the norm*) thus “enter [...] the logic of the identity performance and the [Balkan/Bulgarian] struggle for recognition” (Kiossev, “The Oxymoron of Normality” 7). Although Dinev refuses to provide closure in “Spas schläft,” the story ends on a merely happy note with the narrator predicting a future turn of events with Ilija having found a legal job and thus secured for him and Spas a better life in Vienna.

My textual analysis has shown thus far how Dinev’s repertoire of stereotyped and marginalized Balkan characters besets and upsets the boundaries between Europe’s Western heartland and its troubled margins. And while these two stories share enough thematically to outline the image of immigrant prose as literature well-received by German readership, they also carry the author’s hidden message: the Balkan trope is one of fractures, of difference melded into sameness, problems that need to be addressed. My analysis of the stories demonstrates that the Balkanist discourse offers an alternative paradigm to established theories of hybridity and subjectivity, allowing us to explore the ways in which Dinev’s texts reflect and negotiate Western and Balkan othering practices that have led to the stigmatization of individuals and collectives. The constellations of characters presented on the pages above undoubtedly engage and problematize rigid identities and cultures. Yet in spite of the works’ engagement with multiple attachments to and detachments from ethnicity and nation, the stories’ view of issues of cultural difference does not conform to commonly accepted views about hybrid migrant identities. The identities of Dinev’s characters do not point towards creolized or morphed forms, neither do they overthrow prevailing cultural norms and practices for new hybrid cultural or linguistic formations. Rather, for Dinev, the postmodernist celebration of hybridity and liminality

is a subject of criticism, into which he inserts Balkanist and Orientalist discourses that hierarchize and thus de-essentialize postmodernist notions of hybridity.

### **3.3 WRITING *THE INSCRIPTION OF TRAUMA: A STORY INSTEAD OF HISTORY***

As Dominick LaCapra argues in his book *History in Transit* (2004), there has rarely been a group or a community in whose past there is not some sort of trauma induced that had become, sometimes paradoxically, the basis of individual and collective identities (57). LaCapra continues that the political potential of such foundational trauma can be found in trauma's instrumental role for the oppressed community's coming to terms with its historical past and the ultimate reclaiming of history. Nonetheless, LaCapra remarks, this trauma can also, because of its focus on grievances, hinder the processes of working through or *Erfahrung* (LaCapra appropriates Walter Benjamin's term), that is, the transformation of the experience of the traumatic event (Benjamin's *Erlebnis*) into a more "viable," for the individual or the collective, "articulation" of this experience that would enable, in turn, ethically- and politically-informed actions in the present and the future (55-57, 118).

LaCapra focuses in his discussion on slavery and the Holocaust on such major markers of collective identities. As I have noted earlier, for the Balkan peoples it has been primarily their infamous past as parts of Eastern empires (the Byzantine, the Ottoman, and the Soviet); a lingering memory that has rendered Balkan cultures over time as the opposite of the quick-moving, industrious, rational, and enlightened West. Viewed with mistrust and reservations by the West, the Balkans' association with the Orient has served as a staggering source for the construction of ambiguous identities stigmatized as unworthy of the full European status. In their

strive to create distinctive national identities, most Balkan states based their ideologies on the condemnation and expulsion of the Ottoman influence in the peninsula, and this found its most eloquent expression not only in the rhetoric of their political agenda but also in the arts, literature, and film. The study of the Balkan trope and Western Balkanism's mirror discourse, that of 'native' Balkanism, as developed most notably by Alexander Kiossev, draws attention to how official discourse in the Balkans has absorbed "the quasi-mythical image of everything Oriental, everything Ottoman, and everything 'anti-progressive'" that it tried to deny and how this stigma has permeated the public discourses at home and abroad ("The Dark Intimacy" 182). Consequently, Kiossev distinguishes between two different types of identification that try to compensate for this stigma. The first he defines as "a radical emigration, close to cultural amnesia" acted out as a defense against everything native, fearful, and shameful (182). And the second identification Kiossev relates to the extreme forms of Balkan nationalism and "hyperbolic patriotism" that are based on the reenactment and instrumentalization of certain historical myths such as "heavenly Serbia," "golden Bulgaria," etc (182). With respect to the communist past, such scholarship is still in its nascent phase in Bulgaria. Yet, research about the Czech Republic, Romania, and the Former Soviet Union offers a promising beginning for analyzing the resources and strategies that post-communist societies in the Balkans use to cope with the stigmatizing effects brought about by another traumatic history of domination.

Among the different practices that make the process of working through trauma possible, LaCapra specifies a privileged position to literature and the practice of fiction writing (and Benjamin's notion of storytelling) as a means for transforming traumatic events (*Erlebnisse*) into meaningful and integrated forms of experience (*Erfahrung*). While certain writings display an explicitly performative character—they reenact, as closely as possible, the experience of

traumatized victims—other fictional narratives, LaCapra maintains, may transpose the traumatic experience into a more imagined or phantasized setting (137-138). In both instances, however, fiction writing and storytelling may offer a fruitful basis for interpreting traumatic experiences in their multiple variations—fragmentation, suffering, disturbance, loss, emptiness, etc—as well as their emotional and affective effects on the individual (132). With respect to stigma, Erving Goffman too has remarked that written and oral narratives can be quite telling of similar forms of self-alienation. He discerns

in the published and stage-performed humor of the stigmatized [...] a special kind of irony. Cartoons, jokes, and folk tales display unseriously the weakness of a stereotypical member of the category, even if this half-hero is made to guilelessly outwit a normal or imposing status. (*Stigma* 108)

Regarding our author, it should be noted first and foremost that Dinev's oeuvre exemplifies the return of the modern storyteller whose demise Walter Benjamin laments in his seminal essay "Der Erzähler" ("The Storyteller" 1936). By investing his voice with the power and pathos of myths and folk tales, Bulgarian archaic culture and oral traditions, Dinev revitalizes the craft of storytelling as "experience which is passed on from mouth to mouth" (Benjamin 78). In an interview, the writer remarks that he is, in fact, a collector of stories:

Ich mag Menschen, spreche gerne mit ihnen und höre ihnen vor allem sehr gerne zu. Die Bulgaren sind viel offener als Menschen in Deutschland oder Österreich. Sie suchen das Gespräch. [...] Es ist ein Glück und bereichert mich enorm, dass ich Freunde in unterschiedlichsten Schichten habe. So höre ich verschiedenste Meinungen über die Gegenwart. Ich habe auch sehr viele Roma-Freunde, die in der Gesellschaft am meisten benachteiligt sind. Den Bulgaren geht es sehr

schlecht und die Roma sind die Ersten, die ihre Jobs verlieren und gezwungen sind, durch Kriminalität an Geld zu kommen. Die Roma freuen sich, wenn man sie respektiert und sich für sie interessiert. (“Das Öffnen des Mundes beim Lachen“)

I like people; I enjoy talking to them and especially like to listen to their stories.

Bulgarians are much more open than the people in Germany or Austria. They seek conversations. [...] I have friends from different social classes, a fact that makes me so fortunate and enriches me enormously. Thus, I am able to attend to different opinions about the present. I also have a lot of Roma friends who are quite discriminated in society. Bulgarians are not doing well, and the Roma are first to lose their jobs and consequently forced to criminality as a way to make money. Roma are glad when you show respect and interest in them.

Looking at stories like “Lazarus,” “Spas schläft,” and others, we see that Dinev has successfully captured in the artistic language of Benjamin’s much-traveled man “the experience of the [Balkan] world and a world of [Balkan] experiences” (Leslie, “Walter Benjamin” 5). Dinev’s language is an empathic language stamped by the imprimatur of personal perceptions and collective experiences. His stories bear, to use Goffman’s words, “a special kind of irony,” for they raise many moral but also political concerns related to persons and groups who are rendered by society as different in one way or another. Dinev’s language is a language that transmits the writer’s own experience and that of other Others into the realm of his German-speaking audience, inviting his readers to make this experience their own, to put themselves in the situation of others, an experience that LaCapra terms “virtual” (135). It is through the creation of such virtual experiences that the reader’s affective involvement (LaCapra) can then be achieved



as the necessary means for revisiting our limited understanding of discrete collectives (the Balkans), individuals (migrants, refugees, and Roma), or events (oppression and exploitation as forms of domination, migration, and displacement).

Viewed within LaCapra's, and by extension Benjamin's and Goffman's, framework of thought, Dinev's tales, with their emphasis on the processing and reconstituting of experience of historical and material realities, offer an experimental venue for examining questions about how migrant storytelling thematizes the ways in which particular cultures marginalize specific groups of individuals at specific historical points in time and how such practices are transmitted from one generation to another and from one culture to another. My analyses of "Spas schläft" and "Lazarus" have offered already a deeper insight into the malaise of Balkan identity constructions in the current global context. In these stories, Dinev's ability to engage in semantic play—at times satirical, at other times, ironic—indicates the writer's critical positioning regarding displacement and exclusion at home and abroad as haunting events for Balkan migrants whose stories the writer tells at the crossroads of past, present, and anticipated future experiences. Recognized in their local histories and cross-border geographies then, Dinev's images of Lazarus, Ilija, and Spas become intelligible as an "inventory of traces" (Gramsci) of the mechanisms of (self) representations and (self) stigmatization, according to which Balkan/Bulgarian subjects have been constituted as an Other in the West (what is termed as Western Balkanism) and have, in turn, internalized themselves as "Balkan" and semi-oriental (the symptoms of native Balkanism). Through Lazarus, Dinev creates a voice that carries the traumatic experience of someone whose stigmatized existence and itinerant identity do not remain untouched by the dramatic political and social changes in Bulgaria. And by the end of

“Spas schläft,” the author envisions some normality for his immigrant characters struggling to remake their own (hi)story and identity out of the shards of memory, experiences, and tensions.

In both stories, Dinev does not offer full “redemption” or “salvation” (LaCapra) but an exploration of the emotional nuances of Balkan/Bulgarian identifications—disorientation, failure and shame, self-denial, but also friendship and perseverance—and their causes—the bankruptcy of national capital, economic crisis, and subsequent identity crisis and mass migration. These two stories thus present, on the one hand, the writer’s implicit critique of the repressive mechanisms of Bulgarian official high culture to impose “an identity from above” and their stigmatizing effects on identity. On the other hand, Dinev’s tales demonstrate the utter complexity of triangulating Balkan reconfigurations in a Western context as such complexity becomes increasingly defined by asymmetries of power and domination that shape the relations between Europe’s center and its Balkan periphery.

Yet, Dinev’s narratives, I propose, serve as a lens that can evoke other forms of traumatic experience, and in so doing, reveal ways in which the Balkanist discourse of splintered subjectivities can be transformed into a more meaningful and integrated experience for both Balkanites and Westerners alike. LaCapra points out that “certain wounds from the past—both personal and historical—cannot simply heal without leaving scars or residues—in a sense archives—in the present” (104). With respect to historical trauma,<sup>26</sup> LaCapra maintains that such wounds can resist healing and stay open, pointing to a traumatic past that needs to be relived,

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<sup>26</sup> LaCapra distinguishes between historical and transhistorical trauma. He defines historical trauma as a traumatic event that can be traced back and dated in the past and whose victims can be easily identified: Holocaust and the Jews, or slavery and African populations. Transhistorical trauma is related to the feeling of absence and the potentiality of every member of society to be vulnerable or a victim in one sense or another. With respect to historical trauma, what matters most is the question of representation and the ways (memory work, testimony, documentation, etc.) in which a community deals with trauma as a collective term not as an individual occurrence.

retold, and reimagined (i.e., acted out and worked through) in order for trauma to be demystified, desacralized, and possibly healed (90-104). As I have emphasized above, the Ottoman oppression as a traumatic experience has been perceived as an indelible scar on Bulgarian history, a stigma that laid the basis for the internal split of the nation's body and the Balkan self as the internalized Other. Dinev's "Die Inschrift" from his first short story collection with the same title *The Inschrift (The Inscription 2001)* is such a "trauma story" that, compared to his other stories, most eloquently and artistically captures and recreates the latent legacy of Ottoman oppression as a legacy that stigmatizes Bulgarian identity formation. A powerful and contradictory depiction of syncretism and "Othering," the story revolves around the notions of disintegration and loss on both the individual and collective levels. It is a story that, although it does not make any truth claims about events, explores in an empathetic and unsettling way the dimensions of human vulnerability, of human failings and perseverance in the traces and scars that historical processes of violence and repression can leave on the human self.

Dinev's story is, in fact, a fruitful project. Epic in its intention, it focuses on a community's life in its unheroic forms, thus reminding us of the genre paintings so popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Victorian era. Depicting an 18<sup>th</sup>-century Bulgarian scene of humble peasant life, "Die Inschrift" is at once a literal account of a place identifiable to every Bulgarian (a small village nestled deeply in the bosom of the Rhodopi Mountains in now Southern Bulgaria) and a pictorial composition (a hard-working community where the crafts of blacksmithing, woodworking, and masonry have a long tradition) that imitates well-established styles in Bulgarian visual and narrative culture (e.g., Elin Pelin's short stories and Lyudmil Staikov's film *Time of Violence* 1988). It is within this realistic and intimate domestic setting that Dinev situates his protagonists—the descendants of the Velikov family, Veliko, Stavri, Dimka, Rangel,

Krassen, and of Deljo's family, Neda and Vichra. They are by no means portrayals of a specific national type, but of human archetypes. The blacksmith Deljo and the rich peasant Veliko are the bearers of wisdom and tradition in the village. Veliko's son, Stavri, is a skilled mason. He is honorable and responsible, yet he cannot compromise or forgive. Dimka, his sister, is kind and sensuous, she follows her love for a simple shepherd and falls out of her brother's graces. Neda's fate and tragedy are of a woman born in a time of oppression and the victim of a violent interethnic rape. Dimka's son, Rangel, and Neda's daughter, Vihra, are the epitomes of heroism that one finds in Bulgarian epic folktales. Glorified as the mightiest *haiduk* and female *voivode* of their time, Rangel and Vichra are the terror of every Turkish bashibazouk, hard, grim, and manly.<sup>27</sup> Tales are told about Vichra and her almost mythic cruelty: after castrating her captives, Vichra would hang a chime on their dried out penises and decorate her forest cave with them. One of the last descendants of the great Velikovs, Krassen, once a passionate espouser of the communist cause, is the party's victim. Cast out from the regime, Krassen lives alone in his ancestors' house, where he is driven to insanity. Dinev closes his protagonists' circle with Krassen's American-Bulgarian nephew, John. In 2000, John visits the village Kadin Kale, where he hopes to find a place of comfort and peace after his frenetic life in New York City. Alienated from both the language and country of his forefathers, John is unable to connect with his roots and remains deaf to the voices carrying the memories of past generations. With this character,

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<sup>27</sup> *Haiduk* or *haidut* and *voivode* were freedom fighters in the Balkan lands during the Ottoman rule. They are also central figures in legends, folk songs and folk tales. In the Western tradition, an equivalent of the *haiduk* would be Robin Hood, who stole from the rich to give to the poor. While *voivode* is considered a somewhat more noble designation for a leader, *haiduk* carries along with its positive meaning negative connotations as well. The ambiguity in the meaning of *haiduk* stems from the fact that, while the *haiduks* protected the local population from the Turkish hordes, there were instances when the *haiduks* would steal from local villages too. This negativity in the image of the *haiduk* has been preserved in the plural form of the word in Bulgarian *haiduci*, commonly used today for scoundrel, thieves, and robbers.

Dinev dissolves the boundaries of Bulgarianness as the primary self-identification in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a century fraught with uprooted biographies, migration, uncertainty, and discrimination.

After this somewhat reductive introduction to the story, I would like to turn now to the trope of violence (as instrumental to traumatization) that Dinev uses to mould historical and material realities in artistic language. Dinev's figuration of violence, it should be emphasized, is hardly a redemptive or regenerative source for either an individual or groups, as one finds it in Frantz Fanon and his *Wretched of the Earth* (1961), for instance. Unlike much of continental modern thought (Hegel, Nietzsche or Sorel), Dinev's understanding of violence excludes its glorification as a transformative power that could transfigure civilizations. Rather, Dinev's story is a narrative account of violence as an unavoidable feature of the human condition. Dinev's variation of Ottoman violence can be found in the context of practices and institutions that are not restricted solely to that of the Ottoman Empire. This is not to say that he aims at normativization of the Ottoman experience in and through his fictions. Quite the contrary, for him, literary expression becomes the necessary means for critically engaging with and counteracting certain stigmatizing habits of thought and submissive behavior prevalent in Bulgarian culture.

In the story, to recover the meaning of human violence means first to take an explanatory turn to ancient sources via the power of scriptural metaphors. Thus we read about Veliko Velikov, the oldest member in the Velikov family, and the peripethies of his pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1776. He brings with him a piece of walnut with the following Cyrillic inscription: "Vieles ist gewaltig, aber nichts ist gewaltiger als der Mensch" ("At many things—wonders, terrors—we feel awe, but at nothing more than at man") (37). Dinev's allusion to the first stasimon from Sophocles' tragedy *Antigone* hardly goes unnoticed. Known as *The Ode on Man*,

the passage sings about human progress in the arts and sciences, honoring the great humanism of the Periclean era. What needs to be emphasized, however, is Dinev's reappropriation of the ambiguity with which the word "gewaltig" is endowed. Meaning "mighty" in its etymology, "gewaltig" points back to "Gewalt," power, and destruction. Upon his return, Veliko shares with his fellow villagers the history of the inscription and how he received it from the local carpenter. For his iconostasis of the church St. Panthaleimon—the healer of all diseases—the carpenter needed inspiration and bargained with the deathly ill Veliko. For each of Veliko's visions of the netherworld, the carpenter inscribed a golden letter into a piece of wood that Veliko would receive as a gift if he survived the disease.

Back in Kadin Kale, Veliko's inscription perturbs the illiterate inhabitants of the village. Although unable to read the inscribed golden letters, they are captivated by the artisanship of the carpenter. Only Veliko's wife and the blacksmith, Deljo, are convinced of the inscription's fatalism:

Ich kann nicht lesen, das weißt du, deswegen schaue ich sie nur an. Aber ich sehe, in jedem Buchstaben versteckt sich ein Bild. Dieser Meister hat mit dem Tod gehandelt. Für jeden Buchstaben hat er einen Teil deines Blutes gekauft. Er hat den Tod neugierig gemacht und ihn warten lassen. Siehst du das letzte Wort [...] Mit diesem Wort hat er ihm deinen Atem abgekauft, mit diesem Wort hat er den Tod zum Lachen gebracht. (38)

I can't read, you know that, that's why I'm just looking at it. But I see that in every letter there is a hidden image. This master carpenter bargained with death. For every letter, he bought a part of your blood from death. He made death

curious and let it wait. Do you see the last word [...] With this word he saved your breath from death, with this word, he made death laugh.

Through Deljo's words, the mythic dimension of this inscription becomes fathomable. What Deljo sees in the last word "Mensch" is not its meaning but an image of "Gewalt," a destruction that defines the limits and essence of being human. First inscribed in letters, violence becomes a force that once incited into the community creates circles from which the community will not be able to extricate itself, but will reproduce them in a boomerang effect. Turkish hordes attack the village. The villagers' innocent tricks to save their young boys from "blood debt" and the fate of janissary are revealed.<sup>28</sup> The village is set on fire, most of the peasants are killed, and their young are taken away.

The vulnerability of the human body as one that bears the imprints of physical "Gewalt" (violence) figures prominently in the story. The ethnoracial conflict turns into an intra-ethnic conflict. Veliko's oldest son, Stavri, runs away with the inscription but is caught by the Turks, who take him for a madman and nail his hands to the piece of wood. Unable to bear the shame of his sister's relationship with an ignoble shepherd, Stavri tries to kill his newborn nephew, Rangel, using the piece of wood with the inscription. Yet, Rangel miraculously survives the attempt. Only one word from the inscription leaves its imprint on his forehead, determining Rangel's fate forever. "Gewaltig" becomes Rangel, who shares with Vichra, a child born out of rape (with seven Turkish fathers), the destiny of an outcast hero. "Gewaltig" is also his death,

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<sup>28</sup> The janissary were the sultan's merciless and cruel soldiers, who, at a very young age were violently taken as "blood debt" by the Ottoman military troops from their families (usually Slavic subjects in the Ottoman empire), raised as Muslim, and trained to be the most faithful defendants of Allah and the sultan. Over time, most Bulgarian settlements developed different strategies for hiding their children from the attacks of the Ottomans. In the story, the peasants cleverly shepherd the young boys from the Ottoman debt by disguising them as sheep.

brought about by his traitorous uncle. The signs of violence become visual bodily markers. These markers burn scars of deep and healing wounds, terrains of rupture and suture into which narratives of trauma are inscribed.

“Die Inschrift,” as we can see, is one such narrative, invaded by traumatic images of a past that continues to linger in the present and against whose backdrop the fragmentation and the eventual rebuilding of individual and collective identity is played out. In Dinev’s constellation of protagonists, the images of Stavri (the cohesive ethnic self), and Rangel and Vichra (the products of violence and racial discourse) function as markers for the internal split in the collective and individual body. Their propensity to violence (in its unheroic and heroic forms) and consequent self-destruction erupt as a return of the repressed, signaling, in turn, the downfall of a whole community.

Curiously, Dinev does not resort to antagonists in his story to set up good/bad guys oppositions. What began as a progressive and prosperous community, unified in its struggle for freedom and independence in times of violence, is doomed to a generational drift and decay slowly covered by the sands of Bulgaria’s turbulent history. The story ends with a joyless portrayal of a typical post-socialist village in rural Bulgaria. Aging and depopulated, Kadin Kale is dying out and with it, the memories of people who lived during some of the most dramatic and changing times of Bulgarian monarchy, fascism, communism, and so-called democracy (“Die Inschrift” 73). All that remains is a smoke-black piece of the infamous inscription that survived the fire made by Krassen, the last from the Velikovs, in the winter when communism fell. Only one word, “Mensch,” makes it to the hands of John, Krassen’s nephew. John, however, knows nothing of the inscription and the history of violence it carries with it. “Er hatte nur ein Wort in



der Hand, mit dem er nichts anfangen konnte” (“In his hand, he had a word that did not mean much to him”) (78).

With this last sentence, Dinev closes his story. As in his other stories, “Die Inschrift” is not a “harmonizing narrative” (LaCapra) that offers redemptive solutions. What is offered instead is the writer’s unsettled response to the problem that transgenerational trauma of belonging to the “dark” semi-oriental Balkans imposes on those caught up in its burdened heritage. Dinev’s empathetic representation of the complex sense of the Bulgarian people’s loss of dignity, “das,” as he says in his interview for the Austrian News, “nicht mehr an sich glaubt” (“that no longer believes in itself”), as exemplified in this story, comprises a new, critical mode of self-reflection aimed at reconsidering the Balkan experience and its infamous past and present (“Interview”). Rejecting one’s common Ottoman heritage while preserving some of its characteristics, hybridity, victimization, uprootedness, and vulnerability, are key elements in the construction of the stigmatized Balkan subject as Europe’s internalized Other. These are elements that repeatedly find resonance in ethically, politically, socially, and historically informed discourses concerned with power structures, loss of human dignity, exodus, or domination, and lie at the heart of Dinev’s narratives.

In that respect, my discussion sheds light on the intricate and contradictory phenomena at work by bringing to the surface how Dinev’s fiction tells stories about histories, memories, and territories and how they crisscross and become inscribed in Balkan/Bulgarian subjectivity. Irony and allegory then become the writer’s preferred narrative strategy and ethical imperative, which challenge the old negative stereotypes and attitudes that new patterns of global migration are reproducing. Kwame Anthony Appiah’s notion of cosmopolitanism understands changes not as an after-the-fact justification, but as a way of rationalizing the processes in Europe’s current

transformation with our long-standing habits and values. Similarly, Dinev's works, as forms of cultural translation, also make light of a globalized situation that seemingly produces more bad than good but that, for better or worse, is simply here to stay. And in his macabre and sometimes absurd depictions of Balkan and migrant realities of survival and stigmatization, of sorrow and salvation, Dinev echoes Appiah's exhortation that we must "learn about people in other places [...] their civilizations, [...] arguments, [...] errors, [...] achievements, not because that will bring us to agreement but because it will help us get used to and accept one another ("The Primacy of Practice" 78). Appiah's words reverberate in LaCapra's notion of "empathic unsettlement" as the necessary affective response to the experiences or the hardship undergone by the Other (migrant, refugee, foreigner, etc.) (*History in Transit* 81). As narratives from the borderlands of cultures and traditions, I thus see migrant writings such as Dinev's as narratives that enable their Western readers to look anew at dominant modes of representation and emotionally-charged situations (migration, displacement, oppression, etc.) that can leave a powerful mark on the memory and behaviour of those trapped in them. To challenge and rethink normative judgments means, in the end, to recognize and enact certain distinctions, like self and other, as a way out of the paralyzing indifference of absolute alterity, and in this manner, to find a path towards cultural pluralism and equality.

#### **4.0 EXILIC VOICES OR THE APORIA OF SHIFTING IDENTITIES: THE CASE OF RUMJANA ZACHARIEVA**

The present chapter is devoted to another, less-known and less-celebrated Bulgarian-born migrant, the writer and poet Rumjana Zacharieva, who was born in Rousse, Bulgaria in 1950 and has lived and published in Bonn, Germany, since the early 1970s. My discussion in chapter 3 was guided by an interest in the ways that Balkan male migrant authors, like Dimitre Dinev, interrogate the notion of origin and Otherness in their literary texts and how their fictional characters negotiate the process of identity formation in the respective adoptive homelands. Keeping in mind the specific set of historical particularities informing the writers' native Balkan/Bulgarian culture, I inquire in this study into the particular renegotiation of Balkan female identity in a transnational context as an identification that resonates beyond a normative self-representation found in both minority and feminist writings. In this context, it is important to note that, compared to Dinev, and also Kaminer, Zacharieva's texts display a number of conceptual similarities, or bridges that link themes such as the experience of migration and life in a foreign country to questions of displacement, exclusion, foreignness, language loss and gain, nationalism, integration, and assimilation. Yet, despite these obvious links, what distinguishes her literary productions is what Julia Kristeva remarks about her own fiction, "the ambition of looking [at these issues] from within" ("Avant-Guarde Practice" 222). To put it differently, in her fiction Zacharieva assumes the intimate gaze of a woman, an intellectual, and a foreigner

who makes and remakes (or works out), her self by activating and revitalizing the registers of memory, perceptions, and bodily desire. Her work is imbued with a specifically feminine sensibility that emphasizes the importance of differences, be these gendered, social, or sexual, and of the singularity of individuals in a society governed by principles that standardize spaces and cultures (East versus West), categories of people, and their desires and needs. Zacharieva's is a voice of difference that sends to her readers messages on different levels: social, political, and ethical. Whether it is a return to nationalism or archaic patterns of thought in Eastern Europe or failed tolerance and xenophobia in Western Europe, the writer takes note of it. In that regard, Zacharieva's fiction maps out a personal space for resistance embedded in the public structures of political control and cultural logic as the organizing principles that restrain and dictate the lives of individuals.

Within this context, it needs to be emphasized that Zacharieva's positioning as a female writer resonates with trends (e.g., the private is political) prevalent in feminist discussions in West Germany since the late 1960s. Her narratives' critique of the triple, sometimes quadruple, disenfranchisement of women in patriarchal societies further recalls paradigms typical of the *Frauenliteratur* (women's literature) of the 1970s and 1980s with their focus on gender, social, and/or political inequality. In addition, Zacharieva's emphasis on the individual within the political collective also resembles tendencies that inform the thematic field of much of the *Gastarbeiterliteratur* (guest workers' literature) of the time. And while Zacharieva's metaphorical and poetic language might encourage one to interpret her works solely from the perspective of an aesthetized expression of the social experience of migration and the challenges associated with it, my task in this chapter is to decode those messages in her writings that address how individuals become subsumed within the collective histories of communities

and subjectivities. Focusing on the dominant discourse of Balkanism, I offer a close reading of Zacharieva's autobiographically inflected fiction in order to examine the intricate, and oftentimes ambivalent ways, in which the writer engages, questions, struggles with, negotiates, and in short, "take[s] responsibility for and before the Balkan [female and migrant] 'identity'" in the East and West, at home and abroad (Antić, "The Balkans and *The Other Heading*" 162).

In the public sphere, Zacharieva's bi-lingual works have received favorable reviews in German magazines and newspapers. *Wetzlarer Neue Zeitung* and *Junge Welt* praise, for instance, the sensual and hypnotic power of her poetic style and *General-Anzeiger* acclaims the Marquez-esque fullness of her prose ("Pressestimmen"). Zacharieva was also the recipient of the *Förderpreis des Landes NRW* in 1979 and the *Literaturpreis der Bonner Lese* in 1999, awarded to a non-native author of German for the first time. Nonetheless, Zacharieva's work remains a good example of the literary critics' misapplication of categories (e.g., dissident or foreigners' literature) regarding lesser known transnational literatures produced by Eastern European female intellectual émigrés.

An overview of the published works on the history of contemporary non-native women authors writing in German shows, for example, that migrant female writings from Eastern Europe continue to occupy a marginal position in the field of cultural and literary German studies. A look at Erika Berroth's "Minority Literature," a contribution to the *Feminist Encyclopedia to German Literature* (1997) and Cornelia Niekus Moore's piece on "Hybridity" in the same volume should suffice to illustrate this. As the titles of their works suggest, Moore's focus is the notion of hybridity as an organizing principle in the categorization of female writings, primarily with respect to identity issues, both individual and collective. Berroth's classification features the writers' biographical background as an important criterion for the

specificity of the works' thematic preoccupation with the experience of migration and the his positioning in the social and private spheres. What is striking in both overviews is the fact that Eastern European female writers are generally excluded from the studies. The only exception is that of the Yugoslav writer, Vera Kamenko, whose name Berroth brings up in conjunction with the literature produced by women guest workers of African, Jewish, and Turkish descent. While the long history of the Jewish-German tradition and the greater number of Afro-German and Turkish-German authors could explain Berroth's emphasis on these three groups of hyphenated writers, the omission of Eastern Europe's presence on the German literary scene points to a discrepancy in its categorization by German literary critics. As the individually published articles and books on German writers like the Czech-born Libuse Monikova and the Romanian-born Herta Müller (a recent Nobel prize winner) reveal, women writers from Eastern Europe are either seen as dissidents (based on their countries' political agenda) or grouped, like Vera Kamenko and the Croatian Dragica Rajcic, in the category of labor migration. For all other writers, whose migration to the west was personally rather than economically or politically motivated and whose biographies and that of their characters did not fit the prevalent dissident or labor migrant profiles, German literary reception seemed to have exhausted its classification criteria. Such is the case with Rumjana Zacharieva, who was neither a labor migrant nor a typical dissident. Although Zacharieva appeared on the German-language literary scene as early as 1975, her poems, children's stories, and cultural-political radio reports were merely cited in discussions concerned with the new crosscultural tendencies in the German-language literary and cultural sphere. And if so, her literary output was then typically misplaced and only briefly mentioned in the context of foreign worker's writings (used to designate works produced by labor migrants),

as Barbara Fennell's summary in *Language, Literature, and the Negotiation of Identity: Foreign Worker German in the Federal Republic of Germany* from 1997 attests.<sup>29</sup>

From the very beginning of her career, Zacharieva has opposed attempts on the part of German literary scholars and publishing houses to group her into specific categories based on established theoretical paradigms for reading migrant writings. In that regard, scholars unfortunately continue to relegate Zacharieva's fiction to the well-worn corners of foreigners' literature, focusing primarily on the ways in which her texts engage the experience of foreignness in conjunction with her outsider position as a female migrant writer in Germany; and leaving unnoticed other important characteristics of her works, such as her sophisticated appropriation of the Balkanist discourse in relation to subjectivities and cultures. There are, of course, a few exceptions that deserve notice. For instance, the insightful analyses of German-American scholar Erika Berroth<sup>30</sup> and Ekaterina Klüh<sup>31</sup> in the field of European Germanistik have emphasized the need for rethinking inherited theoretical paradigms from the 1980s and situating Zacharieva's narratives within the contemporary discourses of memory, migration,

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<sup>29</sup> In fact, Zacharieva was the only woman to be included in Irmgard Ackeman's *Eine nicht nur deutsche Literatur. Zur Standortbestimmung der 'Ausländerliteratur'* (1986) with her two short stories "Metamorphose" ("Metamorphosis") and "Ich habe da mehrere Namen" ("I Have Various Names") along with the stories of writers who were mainly associated with the *Gastarbeiter-* and *Betroffenheitsliteratur* (guest workers' literature and literature of concernedness) movements: Gino Chiellino, Said, Franco Biondi, Rafik Schami, Zafer Şenocak, Aras Ören, and others.

<sup>30</sup> Erika Berroth (Southwestern University) has worked more extensively and presented at conferences on issues of identity, memory, and the communist experience in the context of transnational writings in German by three female writers from the Balkans: Rumjana Zacharieva, Carmen-Francesca Banciu, and Marica Bodrovic.

<sup>31</sup> Ekaterina Klüh has recently published her book *Interkulturelle Identitäten im Spiegel der Migrantenliteratur* (2009), in which she applies postcolonial theories of hybridity and third space to analyze forms of cultural metamorphoses in the writings of two German-language authors with Bulgarian background, Ilija Trojanow and Rumjana Zacharieva.

culture, and identity. In my view, however, literary-critical discourse seems to confirm anthropologist David Kideckel's observation that "[t]o much Western historical, social scientific, and political authority, East and West remain fundamentally separate categories of thought with gradations unrecognized" (par. 5). This perception holds true especially for authors coming from Europe's East within—the Balkans, whose cultural Otherness is almost always taken for granted and is rarely problematized by Western critics.

As I have described in the second chapter, however, there have been a number of Balkan scholars at home and abroad who have recently published articles and books in which they draw on and part company with Edward Said's *Orientalism* and other postcolonial theorists. These scholars have conceptualized the historical, epistemological, and methodological conundrum of Balkan subjectivity, as well as the Balkan imaginary as the European "other within," from both a Western and a Balkanist perspective. The list of intellectual achievements in Eastern European and Balkan Studies would be unthinkable without Larry Wolff's wide-ranging historical study, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (1994); Milica Bakić-Hayden's important contribution to Orientalist variations à la Balkan, "Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia" (1995), Maria Todorova's fundamental work on Balkanism, *Imagining the Balkans* (1997); Vesna Goldsworthy's critique of Balkanist neo-colonialism, *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination* (1998); and D. I. Bjelić and O. Savić's erudite essay collection on a Balkan theme, *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation* (2002). Although these works have found wide resonance in the fields of cultural anthropology, sociology, and ethnography with respect to EU politics, integration, and migration, critical literary studies have remained less attentive to the insights that Balkanist research might offer (when applied to Balkan migrant literary works in a



transnational context) for uncovering and rethinking “the hidden epistemological fissures through which transnational subjects continue to emerge” (Gramling, Rev. of *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature* 389). Having persistently inscribed Zacharieva into a Balkanist discourse that conflates difference and sameness, literary criticism has thus deflected attention away from the specificity and individuality of her narratives that, in my opinion, offer invaluable contributions to our understanding of the complexities informing the memories and differing positionalities into which Balkan transnational subjects are thrust by the discourses in their host and home countries.

By bringing into focus her experience as a German-language writer of Bulgarian origin with European heritage and Balkan communist and Ottoman pasts, Zacharieva creates in her autobiographically inflected fiction a mosaic of worlds, histories, identities, and cultures. In her novel *Bärenfell* (*Bearskin* 1999), for instance, she takes the reader into the maze of Balkanism and Balkanite self-definitions via her female protagonist—the Bulgarian-born migrant and writer, Mila. To summarize the novel’s plot: Mila, her German husband, and their daughter travel to Mila’s home country, Bulgaria, during the mid-1990s. A three-day hike in the Central Balkan mountain range, one of the largest protected habitats in Europe with a substantial brown bear population, features centrally and metaphorically in the narration of Mila’s search for a sense of identity, which had been shattered through the experience of migration and the shift in language as well as attempts to reclaim her identity against the persistent inscription of her self as a writer and a woman into ethnic, gender, and national paradigms by both Bulgarians and Germans.

While Zacharieva performs a move in her writing illustrative of Balkan-born intellectuals, whose identity has been influenced by the instability of the geopolitics of the

region, the distinct position of her alienated heroine as an author and Bulgarian woman allow her to mediate between cultures and languages. It is at the junction of fragments and links between places, individuals, and discourses that Mila's life story meets the life stories of others, guiding the reader more deeply into the crisis and estrangement that the modern subject experiences on both the personal and social levels. Ultimately, Mila's exilic voice finds narrative and cultural coordinates that cross the spaces of memory and time to step into, what Julia Kristeva has defined in *Strangers to Ourselves* as one's hidden inner foreignness. At the story's end, Mila attempts to shed her "Bärenfell," that is, the physical weight gain that had plagued her body since her arrival in Germany as well as the emotional weight or burden of being estranged from both her home and her adopted country. Yet, the novel remains open-ended and does not offer closure, only holding out the possibility of resolution: the successful, however painful, gesture of (self) translation, of trans-coding the Other (also within). Zacharieva's *Bärenfell* thus turns into a metaphor of the 'neither' of Balkan female migrant subjectivity that is "marked by a restless chain of negotiations": the heroine identifies neither with her Bulgarian nor her acquired-in-exile German identity nor with anything opposed to them (Milevska, "Balkan Subjectivity as 'Neither'" 5).

Prior to my analysis of the discursive and narrative techniques the writer uses in her semi-autobiographical fiction to interrogate notions of cultural difference, shifting identity, and feelings of belonging and displacement, I would like to discuss briefly some of the ways in which Zacharieva positions herself with respect to the literary-critical discourse on migrant literature, including her misguided labeling by others as a foreign writer in Germany. Zacharieva's self-understanding as a literary writer can, I believe, add another angle of observation that can help us obtain a richer and more individual picture of the author within and

beyond the context of her work. Furthermore, a reading of the strategies the author employs in coming to terms with the structures of migrant publicity can illustrate some of the specificities and points of divergence in the female migrant writers' struggle with their status as a minority and as carriers of specifically migrant experiences.

#### **4.1 RUMJANA ZACHARIEVA—HER SELF-UNDERSTANDING AND ASPIRATIONS AS A LITERARY WRITER**

Before turning to Zacharieva's case, it is important to clarify the notion of the migrant public literary sphere and the critical reception of *Migrantenliteratur* (*migrant literature*). German scholars have often interpreted literature written by writers who are non-native to Germany solely with respect to the works' socio-political concerns and issues of cultural Otherness while disregarding the aesthetic features of literary production. This, of course, is not a new insight, and in both European *Germanistik* and American German Studies scholars have been trying to correct this tendency in theory and practice for some time now.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Here I want to mention the names of Azade Seyhan, Hiltrud Arens, Leslie Adelson, and Venkat Mani, whose works have emphasized not only the social and historical materiality of German-language migrant writings (more specifically Turkish-German works) but also the aesthetic and literary values of these texts. Yet, each one of these scholars has done this from a different angle of interpretation. While Arens's *Kulturelle Hybridität in der deutschen Minoritätenliteratur der achtziger Jahre* (2000) takes up the notion of hybridity as a constitutive element in the negotiation of identities and languages in the literary output in the 1980s in Germany, Seyhan's book *Writing Outside the Nation* (2001) considers the crosscultural nature of textual practices as cultural translations produced outside the territorial confines of the home. In *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature: Toward a New Cultural Grammar of Migration* (2005), one of Adelson's main concerns is to "delineate" and re-locate Turkish-German narratives not within a larger problem (e.g. migrant writing in a global context) but within the tradition of a contemporary German culture (115; 124). Adelson uncovers and assesses in Turkish-German fictions those narrative structures and linguistic subjectivity that meaningfully intervene in the formation of German cultural memory and historical present.

Exemplary in the field of theory is Gerd Bayer's article "Theory as Hierarchy: Positioning German *Migrantenliteratur*" (1994). Bayer draws on Iman Khalil's discussion of German-Arab literature to support his point that the compartmentalization of theoretical approaches regarding different literatures has led to stiffening of reading paradigms and reducing fictions such as German-Arab exclusively to topics concerning Oriental Otherness and exoticism. This pattern has resulted in creating a certain marketability profile of German-Arab writers as primarily Oriental storytellers. Such limitation in public and academic perceptions is a distressing fact, because it not only minimizes the artistic and aesthetic value of these works but also undermines their ability to influence positive changes in society, including, for example, the revision of our understanding of the typical Oriental woman (10).

Bayer's statement is also applicable with respect to other "foreign" writers whose texts have been placed into different hierarchizing categories like *Gastarbeiter*-, *Betroffenheits*-, *Minoritäten*-, and *Migrantenliteratur*, and thereby read through a reductionist lens that excludes different literary aspects and perpetuates Western expectations. These expectations are oftentimes set forward through the textual analysis of what such literature entails and is supposed to problematize: social injustice, cultural synthesis, mutual understanding, ethnic prejudices, and hyphenated or hybrid identities. Bayer asserts that the outcome of such "methodological hierarchy" is inherently connected, on the one hand, with the ways in which migrant writers and their texts are read, studied and taught, and the moment when academic discourse such practices occur (7-8). On the other hand, such "methodological hierarchy" is also an important force regarding the marketing of writers, as the discovery and popularization of certain categorizations

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Mani, for his part, offers in his *Cosmopolitical Claims: Turkish-German Literatures from Nadolny to Pamuk* an innovation of existing analytical paradigms by situating and revisiting Turkish-German fiction within and against the context of current theories on cosmopolitanism, alterity, and national belongings.

like *Migrantenliteratur* (*migrant literature*) have brought success and recognition to those who fit the desirable profile of hyphenated writers. The entrepreneurial activities of the author, columnist, and DJ Wladimir Kaminer are an appropriate example for such a tendency. In both instances, however, Bayer continues, these writers and their works confront the reluctance of criticism and the public alike to account for the fact that before they appear as representatives of minor forms of writings, which are usually associated with debates about the political or ideological nature of their works, these authors are above all “producers” of and “contributors” to the “aesthetic field of literature,” a status that one would rarely question with respect to established German writers (8). Hence, the issue at stake is to place “the literature produced by ‘foreigners’ [...] on equal footing with traditional canonical writers, thus granting their works equal status as ‘German’ literature” (Bayer 11). Bayer suggests that the inclusion of Germanophone literature into the metropolitan discourse of German literature would only be possible if scholars widened the scope of their definition of literature and adopted an equally informed approach that justifies the importance of the socio-political implications as well as the aesthetic aspects of these literary productions.

Bayer’s arguments resonate with the desire of many non-native writers of German to be perceived first and foremost as creators of literature before being relegated to sub-categories or labels. This stance, as we recall from Chapter 3, is starkly pronounced in Dinev’s statement about the Chamisso prize as a form of “Schubladendenken” (“stereotyped thinking”) on the part of critics with respect to writers of non-German origin. The lack of equality in the methodology and recognition of migrant writers and their texts is a scenario that has been of major concern to Zacharieva as well. Yet, for Zacharieva what remains problematic in her own situation and that of other writers is not so much the issue of inclusion into the German literary canon but rather

the selection criteria determining what type of *Migrantenliteratur* makes it to a wider audience to reap success:

Beim Chamisso-Preis sitzen mindestens zwei Goethe-Institut Vertreter. Ich sage es nicht böse...Einige Autoren sind so erfolgreich, weil sie das erfüllen, was die Deutschen einem Ausländer erstatten. Verstehen Sie, wenn man auf dem politisch-philosophischen Bereich nur einen halben Schritt darüber hinaus geht, wird man zum Pfand. Das bin ich. In dieser Rolle bin ich. Ich bin eine der wenigen, die diese Ehrlichkeit haben. (Personal Interview)

On the Chamisso-prize committee, there are at least two representatives from the Goethe Institute. I don't mean this to be taken badly. Some writers are successful because they fulfill the Germans' expectations for foreigners. When one goes only half a step beyond the political-philosophical discourse, one becomes a pawn.

This is me. I am in this role. I am one of the few, who possess such honesty.

With these words, Zacharieva draws attention to the ways in which she as a writer positions herself vis-à-vis current literary-critical practices that grant certain writers and their texts privileges while withholding them from others who refuse to conform to popular trends informing German-hyphenated literatures. Her story "Metamorphose" ("Metamorphosis"), as well as her novel *Bärenfell*, represent Zacharieva's literary attempt at critique and confrontation with current attitudes to reduce her profile to the commonly circulating images of dissident and the corresponding *Betroffenheitsliteratur* (*literature of concernedness*) from the communist Balkans:

Was berechtigt mich andererseits, die Selbstbespiegelung nachzuahmen, die von den anderen Autoren der neuen deutschen Prosa und Lyrik bis zur

Selbstvergessenheit betrieben wird? Und wie lange kann ich an deutsche Türen (Verlagstüren u.a.) klopfen, die sich in zwei oder höchstens drei Fällen wohlwollend öffnen: wenn ich mich zu meinem literarischen Gastarbeitertum oder zu meinem Fremdsein hierzulande bekenne, oder aber (unbedingt) bereit bin, die Geige recht betroffen zu stimmen: es muß ja tragisch gewesen sein, eine sozialistische Kindheit gehabt zu haben. ("Metamorphose" 45)

What gives me the right to imitate the self-adulation practiced by other writers of the new German prose and poetry to the point of absentmindedness? And for how long can I still knock on German doors (publishers' doors, among other things) that would benevolently open in two or at the most three cases, if I admit to my literary guest worker existence or foreignness here, or if I am absolutely ready to chime in affectedly, it must have been tragic to have had a socialist childhood.

At this point, it is informative to cast a glance at Zacharieva's biographical background. Viewed within the historical context of immigration to Germany, Zacharieva is representative of what Carmine Gino Chiellino has termed in his introduction to *Interkulturelle Literatur* as the seventh voice of immigrant authors (56). That is, although Zacharieva moved to West Germany in 1970, her life story as a migrant and writer is not that of the Turkish, Italian, or the Yugoslav guest worker or of the Ukrainian, Russian, or Romanian quota refugee of the 1980s and 1990s.

Zacharieva herself has emphasized that what brought her to Bonn were "personal reasons" and her "love for a German man," and not the dire political and economic situation in her country or the repressive communist system (*Bärenfell* 61). Of her first years in West Germany, she states in the interview I conducted with her in Bonn in the winter of 2009 that for her the seventies were a time when "wir Ausländer mit offenen Armen aufgenommen wurden und als Exoten an

den deutschen Tisch Platz nehmen durften” (“we, foreigners, were welcomed with open arms and enjoyed German hospitality as exotic currencies”) (Personal Interview). This statement would perhaps raise eyebrows among many of her Turkish or Italian fellow writers, but Zacharieva, personally, saw herself in “a privileged position” among the Germans, “a happily married young Bulgarian woman” and already acclaimed poet, who was beginning to make a living and a career as a writer in the West in the mid-1970s. This is not to say that Zacharieva, as a first-generation migrant, did not face many of the peripetia that life abroad brings, such as uncertainty, unemployment, or exclusion. It needs to be emphasized, however, that her world is not that of the “working classes,” but of a writer and a poet, who seeks in and through her fiction to unite her intellectual and professional aspirations with her domestic responsibilities (Bayer 7).

It should be noted, however, that Zacharieva’s critical response to her “Ausländerstatus” (“status as a foreigner”), imposed as a marketing label for her writings, addresses the logic of publishers who position writers like Zacharieva in a niche, whose margins for maneuvering are strictly defined. Of course, Zacharieva’s statement could not and should not be interpreted as an attempt on her side to outsmart that logic. Quite the contrary, her statement exemplifies Kristeva’s assertion of the value of “writing as a woman” today; namely that women writers need to accept the challenge, in Zacharieva’s case of being positioned as a minority within the minority, and to “remain vigilant” and “make their marginality known yet not get buried in a kind of permanent demand for marginality” (“Women and Literary Institutions” 125). Following Kristeva’s line of thought, I contend that the migrant literary public space is far from a secure site, but a place where the identification of female writers is born in the tension between the standardizing practices of academic and public discourse and the individual voices that would oppose one’s inclusion under the umbrella of some kind of group formations. In the interview,



Zacharieva defined herself as a “Nischenautorin“ (“niche author”) rather than a “Konsumautorin“ (“author interested in quick sales”), who crafts literature that cannot so easily be read from the “Froschperspektive” (“blinkered view”) delineated by the demands and the expectations of the market and the audience. Of her “art,” Zacharieva says:

[D]ie Art von Literatur, die ich und einige andere nichtmuttersprachlichen Deutschautoren schreiben, die liefert nicht die Aha-Erlebnisse. Die liefert eine neue Welt. Die ist wie eine kleine Schlacht hier unten, wo der Solarplexus ist, und der Leser muss erstmal Luft holen und überleben und einordnen, er muss sich mit sich selbst auseinandersetzen und wie er zu den Ausländern steht, wie er zu seiner eigenen Identität steht. Manche stellen plötzlich fest, das erste Mal als sie glücklich waren, war es, als sie nicht zu Hause waren. [...] Aber ich, ich gebe Ihnen einen Satz und Sie haben die Antwort parat, und Sie bekommen einen Schlag in die Magengrube, weil Sie wirklich alles erwartet haben, aber nicht das. Und das kann manchmal auf einer Seite sieben oder achtmal passieren und das ist Gehirntraining. (Personal Interview)

The type of literature that I and some other non-native writers in German create does not offer the ‘aha’ experiences. This literature delivers a new world. It is like a small battle here underneath where the solar plexus is, and the reader needs to take a deep breath first, survive, and think it over. They need to grapple with their own self and attitude towards foreigners, towards their own identity. Some readers suddenly realize that the first time they were happy was when they were far away from home. [...] And I, I give you a sentence and you think you have the answer ready, and then you are shocked, because you have expected something

else, not this. And this can happen seven or eight times on just one page, and this is brain training.

In this statement as well as in her literary works, what comes to the forefront is Zacharieva's notion of individualism, of what it means to produce art that bears the double bind imposed on non-native writers in German today: original and unique and simultaneously the same as everybody else's. For Zacharieva, literature thus need not deliver the spontaneous "aha" experience that Dimitre Dinev and Wladimir Kaminer strive to achieve through their fictions and performances.<sup>33</sup> Her tales would not arouse among those rich Westerners the same feeling of compassion or concern as Dimitre Dinev's infamous Balkan underdogs. Neither would they entertain nor make their audience chuckle in recognition and in the unpretentious way Wladimir Kaminer's works do. Nonetheless, literature, as Zacharieva maintains, must affect, provoke, and alter. It must bring its readers to action: to question the known and the unknown, the remembered and the forgotten, the familiar and the foreign, and in so doing, to assemble and reassemble their own identities and world(s).

How this search for identities is set into motion is the central question that Zacharieva explores in her writing across a variety of genres from short story collections like *Die geliehenen Strapse* (*The Borrowed Suspenders* 1998), novels *7 Kilo Zeit* (*7 Kilograms Time* 2000) and *Bärenfell* (*Bearskin* 1999), poem collections such as *Am Grund der Zeit* (*At the Bottom of Time*

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<sup>33</sup> In an interview for the Salzburger Festspiele, Dinev remarks that what matters to him most is when his audience is able to identify with and recognize itself in his characters and their problems, dilemmas, or moments of joy. The medium for such identification is, as Dinev sees it, in the power of mythical stories to which he gives a modern twist. This is also how Dinev sees the role of the myth of Daedal, on which he builds his theater play *The House of the Judge*: "I wanted the viewers to have an Oh, I see-experience, so that they feel empowered by something familiar. With recognition, people open up. If something seems familiar, they are likely to question further, one can palm off the unfamiliar on them. And the unfamiliar is the prerequisite of every culture and every art, because it will not allow itself to be assimilated or pushed about" ("The Bible is an Immigrant" 114).

1993), or radio plays like *Transitvisum durchs Leben* (*Transit Visa Through Life* 1993). In *Die geliehenen Strapse*, for instance, Zacharieva brings together a selection of stories whose style she likens in her interview to that of the “cabaret” story of the modern woman who struggles and triumphs in her search for identity in the practices she carries out on a quotidian basis (Personal Interview). This is a genre not usually associated with minority or guest workers’ writing. And in *Bärenfell*, Zacharieva’s migrant female protagonist undergoes alienation from self, social life, parents, and friends. Yet her estrangement is not that of the woman guest worker, disadvantaged and oppressed in family and society at large. Rather, hers is inflicted by the obscurity that an Eastern European intellectual émigré is confronted with both at home and in the West. In other words, Zacharieva’s literary oeuvre represents in complementary ways the discursive production of female selfhood as fashioned within, between and across the intellectual discourses of Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and the West. It thus entwines personal experience and historical processes and articulates the multiplicity of belonging in her narratives of return to childhood, womanhood, and origins by foregrounding the themes of migration and religion, and issues of identity crisis, language change, and writing.

As this chapter demonstrates, Zacharieva’s prose, like Dinev’s, mirrors and engages, thematically and figuratively, the tension informing the relationship between Europe’s Western center and its Balkan neighbor countries. I will focus on Zacharieva’s second semi-autobiographical novel *Bärenfell* (1999), because it is her most convincing work in terms of the literary task she has set out to do, namely construct selfhood as it emerges from the contexts into which the individual is thrust—the discourse of Balkanism, historical processes, and personal experiences. My analysis of *Bärenfell* takes into account the framing devices, use of metaphors, the interweaving of stories, tempi, places, spaces, and foci, and the episodic structuring of events

to address notions of cultural difference and fragmentation, shifting identities and deep feelings of displacement. Another important moment interwoven in my discussion is the gendered tonality that Zacharieva brings into the construction of her female character. My final remarks thus concern the ways in which Zacharieva adds a second layer of sensation that aesthetically visualizes and makes memorable, in the spirit of Julia Kristeva, her character's estrangement, her own foreignness. In so doing, Zacharieva creates narrative trajectories that trace the recurring image of the modern stranger, whose Otherness is defined by territorial, cultural, social or linguistic displacements and for whom such displacements are invested with both restraint and liberation.

#### **4.2 *BÄRENFELL*—A JOURNEY INTO THE INTIMACY OF ESTRANGEMENT**

Ein Film aus mehreren Handlungssträngen lief in ihr ab: das Jetzt in Deutschland und in der deutschen Sprache, das Gestern in ihrer Muttersprache, das Land ihrer Kindheit, Achim, das Kind, die Eltern, das Radio, das Literaturbüro, die Kollegen, die Redakteure, die Publikationen, die ganze Palette der Sinneseindrücke, die permanente Gewichtszunahme, die undefinierbare Schuld, die Erinnerung an Freude, der Hunger, das Essen, das Bärenfell. (*Bärenfell* 59)

A film of multiple strands was running in her: the Now in Germany and in the German language, the Yesterday in her mother tongue, the land of her childhood, Achim, the child, the parents, [...] the whole palette of sensations, [...] the permanent gaining of weight, the hunger, the food, the bearskin.

This statement characterizes not only the protagonist but also the polydimensional, open, and dialogical character of the narrative. Thematically, the novel oscillates between the Balkans and Germany, between childhood memories formed in the young repressive communist Bulgarian state and a somber critique of the brutalizing years of Bulgaria's current neoliberal era. It also includes reflections on European ignorance of lesser known cultures and a palimpsest of literary modes. The narrative constructs the protagonist as a Balkan writer educated in Western traditions but formed intellectually under Bulgarian communism. Like Zacharieva, Mila is a graduate of an English-speaking high school in the northern Bulgarian city of Rousse and later finishes her college education in English and Russian literature in the West German capitol, Bonn. In West Germany, the twenty-year-old Mila picks up German with relative ease and soon establishes herself as a German-language writer, translator, and poet. Zacharieva's decision to include an article written by her for the German *Westdeutsche* broadcast lends the novel a documentary dimension, making Mila's figure more palpable and realistic and further blurring the boundaries between the author and the main character. As a Bulgarian woman and an intellectual, Mila is confronted with the West's indifference to her home country, as well as with a constant conflation of differences within the East:

Die Eigentümer der Fremdsprache Deutsch kannten kein einziges Wort  
Bulgarisch, von Russisch hatten sie keine Ahnung, und die kyrillische Schrift  
erschien ihnen rätselhafter als die chinesische. Und sie behaupteten, dass die  
bulgarische Hauptstadt Sofia in der Türkei liege, und von der 500jährigen  
Osmanenherrschaft hatten sie noch nie gehört. (48)

The native speakers of German did not know a single word in Bulgarian, had no  
concept of Russian, and the Cyrillic alphabet appeared to them even more

puzzling than Chinese. They claimed that Bulgaria's capital city Sofia was in Turkey, and on top of that, they had never heard of the 500 hundred years of Ottoman rule.

In the novel, Mila refers to this form of imperial/colonizing practices as the "Ungerechtigkeit der Geschichte" ("injustice of history") (13), as a result of which she, like many Balkan intellectuals in the West, aware of the invisibility of their small countries, "battle[s] an inferiority complex as a consequence of [her] status as the Other" (Deltcheva, "The Difficult Topos In-Between" 559).

In the context of Bulgarian intellectual expatriates abroad, Roumiana Deltcheva remarks that:

[t]heir eventual immersion in the culture of the West, rather than integrating them to the center, reinforced their status of in-betweenness. Most became exiles for life: neither part of the firmly established Western identity, nor belonging to the unstable Bulgarian identity which they consciously sought to redefine. (559)

Mila reflects on the state of affairs, and her words curiously echo Deltcheva's insight: "Das permanente Gefühl des Andersseins: Strafe und Privileg zugleich. [...] War sie nicht in Deutschland eine Barbarin unter den Europäern? War sie nicht zu Hause eine Europäerin unter den Barbaren?" ("The permanent feeling of being different: a punishment and a privilege at the same time. [...] Wasn't she in Germany a barbarian among the Europeans? Wasn't she at home a European among the barbarians?") (45). The narrative represents the female protagonist as belonging to what Azade Seyhan has termed "paranational communities and alliances [...] that exist within national borders or alongside the citizens of the host country but remain culturally and linguistically distanced from them, and in some instances, are estranged from both the home and the host culture" (*Writing Outside the Nation* 8). Mila's eventual immersion in the host culture as a German writer who hardly finds reception and acceptance beyond small academic

and literary circles is thus characterized by estrangement. The novel captures this hard to articulate emotional and mental state of separation in the metaphors of the “Bär” (“bear”) and the “Bärenfell” (“bearskin”).

By choosing the title *Bärenfell* and a nude female body for the cover illustration, Zacharieva takes up a long tradition in fairytales and mythology that uses bears as symbolic creatures whose strength or character mirror the psychological state and emotional desires of the main protagonists. From Greek and Roman mythology, we recall two stories—that of the Princess Callisto and the huntress Atlanta—in which both Callisto and Atlanta are transformed into she-bears as punishment after being raped by Zeus (in the former case) or for being born as a girl (in the latter case). We encounter the same motif of shapeshifting in Giambattista Basile’s (1634) Italian literary fairytale where the heroine escapes the marriage plans of her father by metamorphosing into a bear. The French Henriette-Julie de Murat (1670-1716) also resorted to the motifs of transformation and escape in her literary fairytale *The Bearskin*, in which she thematizes the flight from an ogre husband. The Grimm Brothers’ collected version of the German folktale *Der Bärenhäuter* switches the focus to a male character that makes a pact with the devil and wears a bear’s skin as a way to become rich.

The centrality of the bear is thus established from the very beginning of the novel. *Bärenfell* opens with the words of a mountain guide introducing the main character Mila and her fellow travelers in the Trojan Balkans in Central Stara Planina, to the dangers that they are to expect in the mountains:

Sobald ihr einem Bären begegnet, Gott bewahre, lauft den Weg hinauf, [...] den Berg hinauf so schnell ihr könnt. Der Bär ist schwer und kann euch nicht

einholen. Da ist er langsamer als der Mensch. Wenn ihr aber den Berg hinunterläuft, holt er euch ein. (5)

As soon as you run across a bear, God forbid, run up the hill [...] up the hill as fast as you can. The bear is heavy and cannot catch up with you. In this case, it is slower than humans. But if you run down the hill, it will catch up with you.

The guide's words become a reflection of Mila's state of mind. Calling herself a "Bärin" ("bear-woman"), Mila physically struggles to catch up with her climbing companions because of the clumsiness caused by her weight gain. The novel closes a few days later, and the final passage is similar to the opening pages. After 72 hours of an unwilling fast on a desolate hike, Mila once again finds herself climbing a steep mountain. This time, she feels "bärenfell-los" ("bear-skinless"), freed from her bear's hunger and everything that has turned her into a bear-woman (168). She feels free and reunited with the other in her self, which gives her a measure of calmness and stability. The novel, however, does not end on this note. In the epilogue that follows, Zacharieva rewinds the story by offering her readers an ambiguous closure. Looking for her vanished mother, Mila's daughter Tatjana shouts: "Schaut her! [...] Da unten am Hang, der Bär! Hab ichs euch nicht gesagt? Der hat Mamas blaue Windjacke an" ("Look here! [...] Down there on the hillside, the bear! Didn't I tell you? The bear has my mom's blue wind jacket on.") (174). With this ending, the novel eliminates resolution, thus hinting at a perpetual status of self-discovery and self-translation in which Mila's self is bound to live from now on.

A brief ethnographic digression on the symbolism of the bear as it appears in Bulgarian folklore is in order, to understand more fully the complex and pervasive role of the image as a narrative device in Zacharieva's novel. As in most European and North American cultures, in Bulgarian culture the bear symbolizes strength, bravery, solitude, as well as maternal protection,



sexuality, and fertility. As a hibernating animal, it stands for rebirth and return to life. In mythology, the image of the bear points back to the Thracians (a people who populated the southern parts of today's Bulgaria), their gods Artemis and Zalmoksis, and the cult of the forefathers and ancestors (Stareva, *Bulgarian Magic and Fortune-Telling* 504). Stories were told that when Zalmoksis was born he was wrapped in bearskin to reconnect with the gods of fertility. Hence, the Bulgarian beliefs in the healing power of the bear and the bearskin. Whether bathing in rivers where bears bath, or burning bear fur, such rites express the archaic and mythic in Bulgarian culture and folk medicine. It was believed that bathing in bear water would heal the crippled and infirm and burning bear fur would free those under a spell. In past times, moreover, newborns were wrapped in bearskin to be protected from the evil eye.

As Liliya Stareva describes in her book *Български магии и гадания*. (*Bulgarian Magic and Fortune-Telling* 2007), however, the bear is not only a positive symbol. In dreams, the bear is a harbinger of illness and deadly disease. This interpretation of the bear symbol stems from a religious superstition that, although the bear is the greatest enemy of the wolf, the vampire, and the plague, it was born on the same day as the plague. According to old folk sayings, when God wanted to punish the sinful, God would send the plague in the image of the bear. Such double-codedness in bear symbolism can be further detected in Bulgarian legends, where the bear is embodied predominantly in the image of a girl who is, at times, evil-willed and punished by God, and, at other times, good-willed and protected from her evil stepmother by God. Hence, the bear's double nature—human-like and protective, on the one hand, and dangerous and deadly, on the other (Stareva 504-505).

In the novel, the bear's folkloric dual nature allows Zacharieva to reinforce the ambiguity and uncertainty of the life and mental state of her character. Having first emerged in her adopted

country, the bearskin feeling envelops Mila, body and soul, to form both a suffocating outer skin and a safeguard against the impertinences of the outer world, be these (1) the lack of genuine (cultural) differentiation by her German interlocutors or (2) her family's nationalistic, fascist, and racist predilections, which she encounters upon her trip back home to Bulgaria. Mila's misrecognition by and alienation from both societies thus emerge as the product of an inscription into Orientalist paradigms subsumed under the Balkan umbrella by the German majority culture.<sup>34</sup> Torn between Germany/the West and Bulgaria/the Balkans, self and other, civilization and barbarity, the subject thus seeks to resolve the aporia that marks the shifting identities she is attempting to redefine.

In *Imagining the Balkans*, Todorova is careful to underscore the key role that the Balkan mountain range has played and continues to play in the formation and transformation of Bulgarian collective identity. Unlike other Balkan countries, the Bulgarian people are the only people for whom the Balkan mountain has become an embodiment of Bulgarianness and Balkanness, home and security. This phenomenon, as Todorova correctly notes, is due to the fact that geographically the Balkans are situated entirely on Bulgarian territory. Because certain parts of the mountain range acted as impenetrable defenses against the invading foes, the Balkans have historically been of strategic importance for the preservation of the Bulgarian people during times of unrest, particularly during the five centuries of Ottoman rule. Whether regarded in literature and folklore as an "abode" and a "shelter," or animated and praised in songs as "our father," the Balkan range has acquired an important place in the formation of Bulgarian national

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<sup>34</sup> For further details about Western Balkanism's willingness to look at the Balkan region from a macro-colonial perspective, see Alexander Kiossev's article "The Dark Intimacy" in *Balkan as Metaphor* (2002).

consciousness. For the person and writer Rumjana Zacharieva, there is no doubt what the Balkans mean:

Der Balkan, das ist dieses alle Positive und Negative. Das ist mein nationales Bewußtsein letztendlich. [...] Der Bär, der Balkan, das ist ich, mein großes Über-Ich, mein Schutz, wo ich immer Zuflucht finde. Das ist das Bulgarische, das ist das Übergroße. (Personal Interview)

The Balkans is both everything positive and negative for me. They are ultimately my national consciousness. [...] The bear, the Balkans—this is me, my big superego, my shelter, where I can always find refuge. This is the Bulgarian spirit, the super-dimensional.

It is thus logical and hardly surprising that in her attempts to redefine her self, Zacharieva's heroine returns to the Balkans—the main setting in the novel. The Balkan topos serves as an important literary tool that structures the narrative by invoking a multiplicity of spaces, times, and voices. It is in the Balkans that Mila is then able to relive her memories about past experiences in both East and West, and each one of these memories is ascribed a specific significance for the character's negotiation and contestation of her inner and outer world.

The protagonist's attempts at negotiating her unstable but, highly self-reflexive, position are fashioned as two dynamic forms of self-interrogation that grant Mila a sense of agency. The first form concerns her gesture of attachments to and detachments from the country of birth and that of residence, affiliations, and disaffiliations with national and ethnic origins, a kind of "experience-in-identity," to use Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's words ("Acting Bits/Identity Talk" 781). The second form emerges out of the literary self's attempts to think through what Venkat Mani refers to as the "situationality" of her cultural difference (25). In both instances, the

notion of history as a history that “slouches” in Mila’s Balkan/Eastern European origins, as a history that is “ready to comfort and kill” (Spivak 781), plays a crucial role in Mila’s struggle to construct an intellectual identity abroad.

As the product of a first generation migrant, Mila’s relationship to the Balkans has historical depth and the essentialist notion of being Bulgarian looms large in the protagonist’s quest or struggle for a new identity. Bulgaria as the space of her childhood home and “das Land meiner Geburt,” to which the already westernized Mila frequently returns, becomes a determining factor in her search for self-definition (42). As Mila tries to connect with her roots and to fuse the past with the present, her exilic memory inevitably begins to mimic, to quote Andreas Huyssen, “the identity fictions [and inscriptions] that [have] energize[d] nationhood” in the Balkans (“Diaspora and Nation”152). The heroine stages the “experience of history” in identity and in “origins” (Spivak 781) by evoking Bulgaria’s 1300 year-old ancient history and by reenacting major junctures around which Bulgarian identity has been historically and culturally constructed: including its liberation from 500 years of Ottoman Rule; life in a totalitarian state; the collapse of communism, and; the ensuing difficult transitional years. In this first instance, the reenactment often takes the form of performance, of ardent retelling and reciting of passages from heroic epics and ballads that glorify the struggle against the Ottoman invaders and self-sacrifice for a centuries-long-cherished freedom, all literary and oral creations that continue to be powerful shapers of ethnicity and nationhood in Bulgaria and the Balkans.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Unlike industrialized and secularized Western Europe, where the epic had ceased to exist as a practiced tradition in the imagination of national ideology, the heroic epic in the Balkans has become a major ingredient of the Balkan countries’ official discourses of national past and memory (Bakić-Hayden, “National Memory as Narrative Memory” 33-34). For further details about the historical role of literary cultures and oral narratives in the construction of national and ethnic memory in Eastern Europe, in general, and in Kosovo, in particular, see Milica Bakić-Hayden’s essay “National Memory as Narrative Memory: The Case of Kosovo” (2004).

The reader is presented not only with dates and names of military and political figures, revolutionaries, and poets, but also with the heroine's interpretation of key events such as the Russo-Turkish War's Battle of Shipka Pass in 1877-78 that ultimately led to Bulgaria's liberation. The following passage illustrates how the historical signifiers of a nation are retrieved and performed in the narrative consciousness of the expatriate. Standing at the foot of Shipka peak in the Central Balkans, Mila envisions herself standing on an epic battlefield, at "the unlocked gates of lost time" (Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* 10):

Sie befindet sich in einem Gedicht. In diesem pathetischen, gereimten Gedicht. Sie kennt „Die Landwehrsoldaten am Schipka“ auswendig. [...] Sich in einem Gedicht befinden ist ein Ereignis, das ihr für einen Moment das Phänomen namens Geschichte offenbart. [...] Denn damals ist jetzt. [...] Ein Bilck in die Höhe: eine Handvoll Christen. Ein Blick in die Tiefe: Tausende Söhne Mohammeds. [...] Die Landwehrsoldaten–„eine Handvoll Spartaner gegenüber dem Pack eines Xerxes“. [...] Die Ereignisse am Schipka-Paß–die Antwort Bulgariens auf die Vorwürfe der Welt, sein Volk sei ein Sklavenvolk, das sich niemals gewehrt habe. Das mit den Leichen, die die Bulgaren auf die Türken geschmissen haben, ist keine Legende – es ist einer der vielen authentischen Berichte über die letzten Kämpfe zwischen Osmanen und Russen, denen sich die bulgarische Landwehr angeschlossen hatte und die zur Befreiung vom Osmanischen Joch führten–endgültig 1878, nach 500jähriger Sklaverei. (*Bärenfell* 123-124)

She finds herself in a poem; in a declamatory, rhymed poem. She knows "The Soldiers on Shipka Peak" by heart. To be in a poem is an event that reveals to her

for a moment the phenomenon called history. [...] Because then is now. A gaze into the heights of the mountain: a handful of Christians. A gaze into its depths: thousands of Muhammed's sons. [...] The territorial soldiers—"a handful of Spartans against the Xerxes' vermin." [...] The events at the Shipka Pass—the Bulgarian answer to the world's accusations: the Bulgarian people were a slave people who never defended themselves. That Bulgarian soldiers threw at the Turks the bodies of their dead comrades is not a legend -- it is one of the many authentic reports about the last battles between Ottomans and Russians, whom the Bulgarian territorial army had joined; battles that ultimately led to Bulgaria's liberation from the Ottoman yoke in 1878, after five hundred years of slavery.

These literally and politically formed moments of the most glorious battle in Bulgaria's fight for freedom cohere around the partial yet, as Todorova argues, still persistent, Ottoman legacy, along whose lines semi-colonial structures of Balkanist self-perceptions have been reproduced. It is noteworthy that Todorova distinguishes between two types of Ottoman legacy: as continuity and as perception. Whereas the former is associated with political, cultural, social or economic dependence, the latter expresses itself as a process of constant reevaluation and reinterpretation of history by each generation. While the Ottoman legacy as continuity now belongs to the past, the Ottoman legacy as perception can still be traced in the discursive construction of the national and cultural identities in most Balkan countries (*Balkan Identities* 13). Most pervasive, though, is the perception in the Bulgarian context where certain stigmatizing images of one's lack of Europeanness continue to inform the official political and informal public discourses. In a study conducted among Bulgarian students today, Magdalena Elchinova shows, for instance, that to many Bulgarians of the younger generations, what still appears as a major obstacle to the country

becoming fully European is not so much the marginal geographical location of Bulgaria but its limping economy, widespread poverty, chronic low self-confidence (“Bulgaria’s Way to Europe” 52). And I would add, the lack of women’s involvement in the public sphere. These aspects of Bulgarian self-perception inform *Bärenfell*’s preoccupation with and critique of social and economic grievances and their effect on the individual before and after the fall of communism.

For example, in an episode structured as a flashback to Mila’s first meeting as a teenager writer with the Writers’ Association of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP), the reader is taken into a moment that has received relatively little attention in this chapter thus far, that of the novel’s problematization of gender stratification and patriarchal domination in socialist Bulgaria. It is well known that in almost all communist countries in Europe, the regimes propagated and imposed on its citizens the idea of a genderless society, where women were placed on equal footing with men in regards to education, salaried employment, and, ultimately, respect in society. As one might expect though, this hardly turned out to be the case. The male gender persisted as dominant, leading to the continuance of patriarchal structures and the devaluation of gender equality as just an abstract idea. This tendency was most noticeable with respect to the role and activities of women involved in the cultural and literary spheres. In the case of Bulgaria, the years between 1948 and 1989 were marked by the elimination of women writers from the Bulgarian literary scene. As Irina Gigova remarks in the context of the dissolution of the women writer’s club in Bulgaria after World War II, this phenomenon can be explained two ways. The disruption in women’s writing could, on the one hand, be due to the deficiency in the works’ aesthetic quality. That is, these texts did not live up to the spirit or the standard of their times, and consequently, they enjoyed little popularity (“The Club of Bulgarian Women Writers” 93). The lack of such literary output could have been caused, on the other hand, by the “de-

feminisation of mainstream literature” undertaken widely by the Bulgarian communist party (93). Based on the few exceptions in the Bulgarian context, both instances allude to the fact that women intellectuals had to pay the price of marginalization and silence if they were to be integrated into such state-run institutions like the *Schriftstellerverband* (*the communist party writers’ association*) or the publishing houses. Among the few exceptions were Elisaveta Bagriana (1893-1991) and Dora Gabe (1886-1983)—two women writers of national importance. Their works achieved a certain level of political autonomy to the degree that these writers became a part of the party’s literary-cultural institution and were frequently included in every school curriculum. This phenomenon provided the party with a means for channeling its socialist interests, but it also opened up for the writers and their audience a space for resistance and alternate identifications. Zacharieva incorporates a poem by Bagriana in *Bärenfell* to give a more powerful expression of her heroine’s yearning for freedom and horizons beyond the confinements of the domestic and social spheres.

Returning to the novel, we notice that in this particular scene, Zacharieva’s character, Mila, is a seventeen year old teenager whose poetic talent has made her stand out from “ordinary” Bulgarian teenagers. Mila is a rising star among the offspring of Bulgarian poets, and her first early poems published in the popular literary magazine *Родна реч* (*Rodna Retch/Native Tongue*) have attracted the attention of the literary critics of the Bulgarian Communist Party. Mila travels with her mother to the capitol Sofia, where she meets with representatives of the writers’ organization to discuss her works. At the meeting, Mila reads an excerpt from a poem in which the young poet codifies what she calls “die Suche nach Wahrheit” (“the search for truth”) in the image of circles emanating from a rock falling in the water (92). Her poem is met with outrage by two of the literary critics, who confront Mila with, for her, a surprising question:



Sie, Genossin Mila, sind fast siebzehn, und in ihrem Alter gehört es sich, daß Sie sich mit dem Thema Liebe beschäftigen, und worüber schreiben Sie? [D]as wollte ich auch wissen, was für Kreise Sie damit meinen! Und was das für eine Wahrheit ist, die Sie meinen! [...] Es wäre tatsächlich besser für ein so junges Mädchen, die Nase nicht in die Bereiche der Erwachsenen zu stecken, so was könnte unangenehm werden. (*Bärenfell* 92)

Comrade Mila, you are almost seventeen years old, and in your age, it is appropriate that in your poems you engage the theme of love, and what do you write about? [I] wanted to know this too, what do you mean with these circles? What kind of truth do you have in mind! [...] As a matter of fact, it would be better for a young woman like you to just keep her nose out of grown-ups' business; something like this can become very unpleasant.

This example exposes the patriarchal stance of the communist party to look at women's art solely from masculine parameters that relegated their writings to such women-specific themes as love; themes that would conform to the Soviet Union's ideology carried through in all communist countries; namely the dissolution of individualism through "the resignation of the cultural producer [and] the woman [...] to the needs of the collective (Gigova 94). The committee members' attempts to prescribe and suppress Mila's creativity lead to Mila's increased frustration, as the young girl sees writing as a medium in her search for freedom and individuality (*Bärenfell* 92-93). In that regard, her experience does not differ much from the existential dilemmas with which other Eastern and Western European women intellectuals and writers, who sought inclusion through their works into a male-dominated public literary sphere, were confronted. For Mila, who grew up in an extremely closed and patriarchal society, the

search for autonomy and emancipation meant, in the end, an escape into the arts, the English language, and the worlds of literature. This move positioned her, as a nascent author, on the line between the collective and the individual, neither as a part of the state-controlled apparatus nor as a real opposition to it.

This polarized duality in Mila's quest for a distinct lyrical identity will reappear in later works that Mila composes as a German-language migrant writer who faces yet again new limitations of her possibilities for expression; limitations this time brought forth by her social, linguistic, and cultural marginalization in the West. As I have shown thus far, Mila inserts into her personal account flashes of Bulgaria's history and literature. In so doing, she writes her migrant life story as a narrative of identification and disidentification, in which she mimics and recreates current Balkan modes of cultural self-representations, whose present moment is European but whose past is constructed by non-Western, Soviet, and Ottoman experiences, memories, and fictions. As she reconstructs her tale in migration, Mila finds herself, as a woman, an intellectual, and a Balkanite, haunted by multiple pasts. Her desire to account for the differences of Bulgaria's subordinated pasts from a "subaltern" perspective leads her to the insistence of cultural translation, in Homi Bhabha's sense, as a "staging of cultural difference" (*The Location of Culture* 227). In real life, Zachariewa is not only a writer but also a translator. And so are her fictional characters that she translates into life, as being born again across languages, cultures, and countries. As Mila tries to make sense of estrangement, she translates or calls into life in a different language, the discursive spaces and institutions, be these social, political, or cultural, into which her personal and authorial selves are already enmeshed.

At the same time, however, Mila's performance of cultural translation disturbs an easy transcoding of cultural difference, what Spivak calls in the post-colonial context, "the horror of

an absolute act of intercultural performance” (782). Consider the opening pages of chapter 4, in which Mila passionately recites an untranslated couplet from the Bulgarian ballad “Chadshi Dimitar,” a song that praises the *haiduts*,<sup>36</sup> Bulgaria’s adored 19<sup>th</sup> century resistance fighters: “Nastane wetscher, messetz izgree / zwezdi obsipjat swoda nebessen / gora zaschumi, wjatar powee / Balkanat pee hajduschka pessen” (“Evening comes, the moon rises / Stars flood the vaulted sky / The woods rustle, the wind blows / The Balkan sings a haidut song”) (69). Mila’s refusal to translate the song into German thus marks a space of cultural untranslatability, of that which remains unshared and contested between cultures. She remarks,

Das Gedicht war schöner als die Sommernacht des Balkan, schöner als die Sterne, als das Unglaubliche, von dem die Rede war, und dieses Unglaubliche war der Tod. [...] Davon [von diesem Gedicht] gab es nur schlechte Übersetzungen und eine Menge Sekundärliteratur [...] Und das Gefühl der Ohnmacht. Das Unübersetzbare blieb unübersetzt. Und nur diejenigen, die das Original gelesen hatten, wußten wovon sie sprach. (*Bärenfell* 68)

[t]he poem was more beautiful than the summer night in the Balkans, more beautiful than the stars, than the incredible thing of which the poem speaks, and this incredible thing is death itself. [...] There were nothing but bad translations of this poem, and a bunch of secondary literature. [...] And the feeling of helplessness. The untranslatable remained untranslated. And only those who have read the poem in the original, know exactly what she means.

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<sup>36</sup> Zacharieva’s use of *haidut* differs from Dinev’s use of the term. In Dinev, *haidut* or *haiduk* is double-loaded, meaning both negative and positive. Zacharieva, however, imbues the term with only positive characteristics captured in the image of the resistance fighter.

Denying an easy translatability in which Mila-as-writer would otherwise sustain an illusion of an institutionalized and absolute translation of intercultural performance and fixated identity, the artist casts aside the possibility of agency through self-identification and self-explanation (via language) in favor of linguistic self-representation grounded in “Das Unübersetzbare blieb unübersetzt” (“The untranslatable remained untranslated”) (68). She resists “the possibility of assertion of agency by a minority artist” and thus frustrates what would otherwise result in, following Mani’s discussion of Spivak, “the cooptation of the artist by ‘imperial malevolence’” (*Cosmopolitical Claims* 159). And transcending the author, these differences can only be heard in native tongues, as they constitute the very memory of communities, whose stories are still silenced by the hegemonic West and, as a result, remain in the periphery of knowledge, unnecessary and untranslatable.

In their discussion of the future of the post-communist bloc in a new European order, the editors of *Over the Wall/After the Fall*, quote Istvan Rév’s words that “memory constitutes identity, the writing of history [...] establishes and reestablishes identity ‘through new narratives,’” which, one could add, cohere as memory unto themselves (qtd. in Forrester et al. 22). In *Bärenfell*, Mila’s conscious act of remembering and retelling her individual story, juxtaposed with the dominant version of Bulgarian national historiography, reveals her desire to perform a willed self-creation. In her critical engagement with and retrieval of specific elements of great and small hi/stories, private accounts, and official narratives, Mila creates a sense of self and homeland by charting her individual space and time within and against Bulgaria’s national space and time.

The protagonist does not create a timeless, romantic image of her home country, because her image of Bulgaria is shaped by the exilic experience of someone who shuttles between the

home and adoptive country and who has maintained strong familial ties. Hence, her attachment to the home country is burdened by the recollection of a national framework that is marked by feelings of incarceration, hopelessness, and inferiority, and temporally centered on her childhood in a totalitarian Bulgaria and on her experience of the chaotic years of the Bulgarian transitional postcommunist period. Struck by the animosity and alienation of her Bulgarian contemporaries, Mila is no longer able to recognize her own people, for whom she herself, as someone living in the West, has come to embody hope.

Hoffnung hatten in ihrem Land nur noch die Fußballspieler, die Pornostars, die Schwarzmarkthändler, die Mafiosi und die Bankiers. Solange die Demokratie nicht da war, konnten Milas Landsleute auf sie warten und auf bessere Zeiten hoffen. Gebrauchtwagen, Sonderangebote, Fremdenhaß, Abschiebegesetze—das war das unbekannte Gesicht der Demokratie, dem sie immer wieder begegneten: Zuhause und im westlichen Ausland. (97-98)

In this country, hope had only the soccer players, the porn stars, the black marketeers, the mafia, and the bankers. As long as there was no democracy, Mila's countrymen could only wait for her and hope for better times. Used cars, clearance sales, xenophobia, deportation laws—the unknown face of democracy met them everywhere: at home and in the West abroad.

Mila's particular insider/outsider position of the expatriate thus affords her privileges otherwise unavailable, as she is able to bring the adoptive and mother cultures into a single space of interaction and to gain a more critical insight into the particularities of Bulgaria's current socio-political and cultural life. In Mila's eyes, the living conditions in the 1990s are likened to that of dogs: hungry people roam the streets of Sofia along with famished stray dogs. To escape the

long, cold winter days, the impoverished and desperate pensioners of Bulgaria are a constant presence in the heated Sofia buses or the source of quarrels among the residents of Sofia waiting for bread in the long queues in front of empty grocery stores.<sup>37</sup> Disquieting articles in the newspapers about murders in families, injustice, and desolation inform Mila's perception of her home country as a jungle where animals fight for everyday survival and existence:

Auf offener Straße verhungerte streunende Hunde, immer wieder die Hunde. In den Wäldern des Balkan, in der Nähe der Dörfer, wurden immer mehr Wölfe und Bären gesichtet: Die wilden Tiere witterten das Tier im Menschen. [...] Der Mensch ist dem Menschen [...] ein Wolf, ein Bär, ein Hund, dachte Mila. (*Bärenfell* 101)

Stray dogs were starving on the streets, the dogs over and over again. In the woods of the Balkans, nearby the villages, people would catch sight of more and more wolves and bears: The wild beasts sensed the beast in man. [...] Man is to a man [...] a wolf, a bear, a dog, Mila thought.

For Mila, the brutalization of her nation plays itself metaphorically as the bearskin, an “identitarian discomfiture” that is mediated through acts of disidentifications and disaffiliations with ethnicity and the nation (Mani 89). One of the most provoking scenes in the novel is when Mila exchanges opinions with her parents and friends about nationalistic approaches to preserving the threatened ethnic Bulgarian identity and extricating the country from the

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<sup>37</sup> The novel's portrayal of the animal-like interpersonal relations the main protagonist encounters in Bulgaria's capital in the 1990s and the general decline of moral and political values in the country is an emerging common theme among Bulgarian expatriates in Europe. With certain variations, we encounter the dog-like or wolf-like motif most notably in French theorist Julia Kristeva's second semi-autobiographical criminal novel *The Old Man and the Wolves* (1994) and Austrian writer and journalist Ilija Trojanow's reportage novel *Hundezeiten. Heimkehr in ein fremdes Land (Dog's Times. A Return Home to a Foreign Country)* (1999). Both works take a sober but personal stance on post-totalitarian Bulgaria and the dehumanizing standard of living created by the state and its institutions.

suffocating financial and political crisis. Mila rejects her interlocutors' fascistic approval of past, terribly misguided Nazi attempts to do the same followed by such, to Westerners' ears, hazardous statements that what Bulgaria needs now is someone with Hitler's iron hand, someone who would establish discipline and order in this devastated country (*Bärenfell* 120). There is nothing left for Mila but to renounce her compatriots and their attempts at a flawed, simplistic reclaiming of the ethnic as a superlative category:

Du hast kein Land mehr Bärin, kein Geburtsland mehr, geschweige denn ein Vaterland! In deiner Sprache heißt es öfter 'Land meiner Geburt' als 'Vaterland.' Und du hast immer behauptet, du seiest eine Deutsche ohne Hitler im Kopf. Sieh sie dir an, deine eigenen Leute: lauter kleine Faschisten! Warum bist du nicht schon im Englischen Gymnasium gestorben, Bärin? (42)

You no longer have a country, bear woman, no native country anymore, let alone a fatherland! In your language, one often uses 'country of my birth' for 'a fatherland.' And you have always claimed you were a German without Hitler in your head. Look at them, your own people: nothing but little fascists! Why didn't you die in the English-speaking high school, bear woman?

As this example makes clear, Mila transcends Bulgaria as a history that kills. That is, she dis-identifies with the poisonous fabrication of a consolidated ethnic identity in order to embrace the multiplicity of cultures and identities that constitute her own life. "Erst die Konfrontation mit der deutschen Sprache tötete den kleinen Faschisten in ihr" ("It was the confrontation with the German language that killed the little fascist in her") (62). To apply Tzvetan Todorov's words to Mila's context, "as someone who has lived within a foreign culture [...] I can no longer subscribe to my 'prejudices' as I did before, even if I do not attempt to rid myself of all

‘prejudice.’ My identity is maintained, but it is as if it is neutralized; I read myself in quotation marks” (*The Morals Of History* 15).

It is for this last reason that the novel succeeds in transcending the formulaic, normative, and all too common representations of “good German, bad Balkanite,” identities firmly planted in ethnic and national stereotypes. In performing a self-proclaimed identity as “eine deutschsprachige Autorin bulgarischer Herkunft” (“a German-language writer of Bulgarian origin”), Zacharieva, and by extension her alter-ego literary self, trans-codes an ethnic and collective history into a defanged individual and paranational memory that allows Mila to claim her personal space in time: “Ich bin eine Deutsche ohne Hitler im Kopf” (“I am a German without Hitler in my head”) (131). Venturing through the sands of time, Mila overcomes the fatal 20<sup>th</sup> century to weigh the ten previous centuries against the twenty years of communism she had experienced:

Es gab dieses andere Bulgarien, das noch vor dem 9. September 1944 existierte. Dieses Bulgarien hatte es seit dem 7. Jahrhundert gegeben. Das Bulgarien der Protobulgaren, der Slawen und Thraker. Das Bulgarien vor 1396, das Bulgarien vor 1990, dem Jahr der freien Fassaden. Was waren die zwanzig Jahre sozialistisches Vaterland im Vergleich mit dem der vergangenen Jahrhunderte? (130)

There was this other Bulgaria that existed before September 9, 1944. This other Bulgaria has existed since the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The Bulgaria of the Proto-Bulgarians, of the Slavs, and the Thracians. The Bulgaria prior to 1396, the Bulgaria prior to 1990, the year of free elections. What were the twenty years of a socialist fatherland compared to the past centuries?



Mila claims a home in history, but it is a history the meaning of which she, like many other expatriates estranged from their homes, builds out of, in Salman Rushdie's words, "scraps, dogmas, childhood injuries, newspaper articles, chance remarks, old films, small victories, people hated, people loved" (*Imaginary Homelands* 12). Like Rushdie's India, Mila's version of Bulgaria is a Bulgaria "of the mind," an imaginary place, a "Traumland" that paradoxically but painfully allows her to remain at home while abroad because, as she states: "Nie würde sie ihr Land verlassen, nie" ("She would never leave her country, never") (*Bärenfell* 130).

#### 4.3 ALIENATION REFIGURED

As I have demonstrated in this chapter, Zacharieva's creative project displays the ability to insert us into a poetical momentum that aesthetically (via the metaphor of the bear) verbalizes and visualizes her character's self-estrangement in the context of political, familial, and social structures that define her as a woman and a writer, a migrant and an intellectual, and an Eastern European in the midst of the Europe's West. *Bearness* refigures alienation in its multiple reincarnations and "expose[s] the foreignness of one's inner life [...] in order to transpose it again into other signs" (Kristeva, "The Other Language" n. pag.). A restless wanderer who seeks herself in the whirlwind of the old within the new, and in her lost mother tongue and in the sounds of the foreign language, Mila relives the shattering of her self as the shattering of her body. As Zacharieva's heroine reaches out to experience, contemplate, and dramatize the shattering of this presumably unitary self, she leads readers into an intimate moment of introspection and reflection that maps before their eyes several new boundaries, which, in turn, mark the territory of multiple "I"s. As each "I" begins its own narrative, it loses and dissolves

itself in the next, bringing the subject to her resurgence, splitting, and renewal. It is in the dialectic of entrapment and escape that the self's ceaseless transformation becomes possible, a metamorphosis that the novel has robbed of closure.

And herein lies the ethical imperative of Zacharieva's semi-autobiographical writing. In shifting the limits of the subject's enclosure, her narrative opens up a third territory, where subjectivity is constructed—in the aporia between identity-forming powers and practices implicated in the discourses of history, ethnicity, nationhood, and language. Viewed within the context of migration and foreignness, such dialectical and dynamic escapes in writing require putting back fluidity and ambiguity into play as elements that unsettle the boundary between inside and outside, self and other, East and West, and difference and sameness. The artistic move of uncovering, dissolving, and transcending the confines of trapped existence ultimately involves rethinking and reconceptualizing our notions of nation and history, “in which,” as Kristeva has prophesized, “foreigners [could and] will find a polyvalent home” (“Avant-Garde Practice” 224).

## **5.0 REACHING FOR A COMMON GROUND: WLADIMIR KAMINER AND THE NEW PORTRAITS OF IMAGINED COMMUNITIES**

The two case studies offered in chapters 3 and 4 demonstrated how the contextual and historical particularities and peculiarities informing German-language migrant writings from the Balkans stimulate specific theoretical and historical inquiries, raising new questions and challenges for literary critics in search of more appropriate conceptual models and paradigms. The incorporation of the Balkanist discourse in my reading of examples from Dinev and Zacharieva's fiction helped untangle the obscurity and difference of Balkan identities in the contexts of history and of intra-European migration between the 1970s and the early 2000s. With their attention to details, exceptions, and sets of specificities, these case studies further uncovered specific aspects of the Bulgarian migrant experience that are not so easily ordered and categorized according to existing theoretical schemata such as hybridity and liminality, aspects that receive a different treatment again in the works of other young writers like the Russian-German Wladimir Kaminer or the Polish-Austrian Radek Knapp. The latter group of authors does not share the same migration experience with Dinev and Zacharieva and its literary negotiation of the past is informed by a different type of intimacies with the country of origin as well as that of residence. This shift in perspectives thus opens up new avenues of thinking and sets of inquiries concerning the social and cultural processes and struggles that surround other Eastern European transnational writings in German.

The current chapter on the Berlin-based Russian author, Wladimir Kaminer, is conceived as a further response to this recognition. Kaminer, like Dinev and Zacharieva, belongs to the most recent immigration wave from Eastern Europe and is part of a group of popular and successful migrant authors of non-German origin such as Feridun Zaimoğlu, Zsuzsa Bank, Terezia Mora, and others. Different from the literature of labor migration, Kaminer's work no longer concerns itself with the immigrant's struggle to achieve a new identity in response to the host culture's demand for integration and assimilation. His texts explore instead, from an ethnographic perspective, the host culture itself as the "Other." Such writing thus articulates a *Literatur der Post-Integration (literature of post-integration)*<sup>38</sup> that seeks to envision a Third Space in which a new identity can be negotiated as individuality. This type of literature is highly aware of the media's significance in the discursive reproduction of images of Europe's Eastern "Others," an aspect that cannot be obliterated in the attempt to forge a new identity. Kaminer's treatment of the not-long-gone reality of the Soviet Union, which is more mediated and reflective than Dinev and Zacharieva's textuality, rejects the burden of a totalitarian past and its legacy for the construction of Russian internal Otherness. What comes to the forefront instead is Kaminer's entrepreneurial engagement with the exciting, improvisational time in which Berlin's inhabitants, visitors, and migrants, as well as the writer himself, found themselves after the changes of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Consequently, Kaminer's outlook appears to be most cosmopolitan when his vision of Germany and Europe maps geographical and cultural spaces that are inherently reconfigured by the large multi-directional migration movements, undoing the certainty of the immutable links between cultures, peoples, identities, and specific places. In so

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<sup>38</sup> *Literatur der Post-Integration* signals the last third phase in the tradition of German-language migrant writings since the 1960s. The previous two phases are known as *Gastarbeiterliteratur* (guest workers' literature) and *Betroffenheitsliteratur* (literature of concernedness). For more information, see the Introduction of this dissertation.

doing, Kaminer's oeuvre transcends the discussion of migration and questions of Balkan identities the other two authors provide to offer a related, yet differentiated, account of the processes of inclusion and exclusion, identification and disidentification, and of the stereotyped patterns and mechanisms that inform present German(ic) collective imaginations against the backdrop of eastward EU expansion.

Taking this final observation as my starting point, the goal I pursue in this chapter is as follows. After a brief sketch of Kaminer's biographical background and academic reception, I examine the thematic and aesthetic strategies the writer uses in renegotiating the experience of migration from East to West and current images about the last wave of immigrants, the Russians. I focus in particular on Kaminer's employment of stereotyping, displacement, and travel to highlight the similarities and differences in this author's treatment of binary oppositions and grand narratives typical of modern thinking. In this sense, my textual analysis of Kaminer's oeuvre entertains the idea that postcolonial paradigms can indeed provide fruitful points of intersection between postcolonial discourse and Eastern European and German realities, as well as a vantage point for contemplating German-language writings from Eastern Europe. In Kaminer's case, each short story cycle, *Russendisko* (*Russian Disco* 2000), *Die Reise nach Trulala* (*Travel to Trulala* 2002), or *Mein deutsches Dschungelbuch* (*My German Jungle Book* 2003), elicits a postcolonial interpretation as an artistic enterprise that offers glimpses into crossed spaces and forms of identity born out of journeys and dislocation. Furthermore, the diversity of cultures and characters that populate Kaminer's fictional worlds portray the social aspect of hybridity and liminality. Kaminer's works, therefore, represent a commentary on and reconfiguration of postcolonial theories of migration and alterity. However, as Iver Neumann writes in the context of the historical construction of the Russian and Tatar Others, "[d]ifferent

processes of identity formation are dominated by different kinds of othering, and so they call for different readings” (*Uses of the Other* 163). In line with Neumann’s observation, I seek to move beyond the confines of postcolonial consciousness that underlies a literary interpretation of Kaminer by tracing a thought that I have been pursuing throughout the previous chapters. Hence, I will contrast: 1) how certain tropes of Eastern European Otherness are produced within Western discursive models of identificational representations, and; 2) how these tropes are accordingly reinscribed and reproduced within the representational discourses operative in the communities subject to the particular kinds of Western otherings.

We recall from Chapter 2 how Russia as “Eastern Europe” was the centuries-old product of the Western European Enlightenment project. Unlike the Orient, Russia’s Eastern Otherness was not the antipode to European civilization, but a complement that helped create the superiority of a more developed West. In addition, unlike the Balkans, the Russian lands were known and not forgotten. They were marked by an increased visibility that stemmed from the Western European intellectual’s desire to observe and explore the vast Christian, yet still barbaric, territory of Peter the Great. What followed was the creation of a representational matrix according to which Russia was positioned as the in-between. The country was either relegated to Asia or belonged to Europe, and the location depended on the Westerner’s benevolent or less benevolent point of view of Russian realities. The Balkans’ Otherness, by contrast, emerged in the gray zones of Western knowledge of and interest in the European Levant. Perceived as incomprehensible and daunting, the region materialized in Enlightened Europe’s imagination as a black hole outside the time and space of civilization. Most disturbing remains the fact that this metaphor of invisibility continues to persist in European representations of the region even today. Chapters 3 and 4 thus focused on the ways in which Balkan migrant writings have

engaged the historically pathologized image of Balkan discursive geography and Balkan migrant subjectivity against the backdrop of an expanding Europe, by recreating and problematizing historically grounded hierarchical configurations of the Balkans and Europe within the host society and beyond. Juxtaposing the present chapter to my treatment of Dinev and Zacharieva, I show how Kaminer's rendering of the Russian migrant and foreigner underscores an identity that transgresses ethnic, cultural, and national determinations but that does not seek to dissolve Russianness or migrancy in Europe. Rather, Kaminer's works seek to carve out a space for new interpretations and negotiations of Russianness, Germanness, or Europeanness in lieu of the existing representative binaries of East and West. The reason, I will argue, has to do with Kaminer's embrace of cosmopolitanism, which he plays out at the juncture between national and transnational models for a Euro-Russian world conceived as a multicentered formation.

Viewed from this perspective, my comparative focus in this chapter bears out Azade Seyhan's assertion that contrasting migrant texts originating in different cultural and historical settings allows for a better understanding of "the critical linkages between local and global cultures and linguistic transposition, bilingualism, and reimagined nationalisms" (*Writing Outside the Nation* 17). I argue that when placed in dialogue, the chapters on Dinev, Zacharieva, and Kaminer offer valuable insight into existing reconfigurations of local identities (i.e. that of Eastern European (Russian) and Balkan (Bulgarian) migrant identities that) that, while grounded in Euro-identities, remain sensitive to the changes happening in their respective motherlands. Positively represented, Berlin and Europe's metropolitan spaces appear in Kaminer's narratives of migrant everyday survival as key sites of intervention and as the spaces of alterity within which Russian migrant and diasporic identities are shaped and from which modern German and European cultures are born. As far as the space of Russia is concerned, Kaminer's literary

account of his homeland do not fail to uphold ties to Europe, underscoring the patterned nature of Western and Russian discursive debates to represent Russia historically and culturally as either a contemporary equal of, or potentially superior to, Europe. As Neumann insightfully postulates with regard to the ambiguous Russian discourse on Europe:

Globalization means that “Europe” may be nowhere, in the sense that it no longer has one and the same center in all contexts, but it also means that “Europe” is everywhere, in the sense that discursive elements like the ones mentioned above are permeating more and more discourses. (179)

My final remarks thus concern the question as to whether we can view Kaminer as part of a globally emerging transnational literature that articulates new identity formations as an outgrowth of globalization and a response to it.

### **5.1 BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF KAMINER**

From the contemporary non-German authors writing in German, Wladimir Kaminer is perhaps *the* writer who was able to establish himself most quickly as part of the new wave of German authors from both East and West that emerged after the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. With Dinev, Kaminer shares the experience of the 1960’s generation. Born a year earlier, in 1967, to Russian-Jewish parents, Wladimir Kaminer graduated from a music school and completed his higher education in theater studies in Moscow. The lack of political and economic stability that enveloped the Soviet Union in the 1980s and the problematic experiences that Soviet artists faced only strengthened Kaminer’s belief that the best option for him would be to pursue a life and a career beyond the borders of his homeland. He migrated to East Berlin as part of a fifth



wave of Russian-Jewish immigration after the German government opened the border in 1990. Without prior knowledge of German and after only nine years in his host country, Kaminer has penned over twelve books in German, a phenomenon that prompted his contemporaries to declare Kaminer “Berlin’s most popular Russian.” Witty and entertaining, his short story cycles tell tales about the ordinary yet eccentric everyday life in Germany’s capitol and the province. *Russendisko* (Russian Disco 2000), *Mein deutsches Dschungelbuch* (My German Jungle Book 2003), *Karaoke* (Karaoke 2005), and *Ich bin kein Berliner. Ein Reiseführer für faule Touristen* (I Am Not a Berliner. A Handbook for Lazy Tourists 2007), to mention but a few of his books, have inspired the general audience to associate Kaminer with the hip generation of younger German authors such as David Wagner, Christian Kracht, Jenny Erpenbeck, and Antje Ravic Strubel. In addition, translations that quickly followed most of his works extended his star status beyond the FRG.

Kaminer, it needs to be emphasized, is not only a writer, but also as a multi-media performer. He has reached cult status with his audiences as the talk show host for *Multikulti*, a radio broadcaster in several languages, a DJ of the famous *Russendisko* (Russian disco) at Kaffee Burger in Kreuzberg, and a columnist writer for a number of German newspapers and magazines ranging from *TAZ* to *FAZ*, and from *Der Spiegel* to *Focus*. An already established media celebrity, a model, and a representative for Berlin’s vibrant Russian diaspora, Kaminer has become the embodiment of “the new spirit of Russian cultural entrepreneurship” that addresses a native German audience as much as Berlin’s diverse immigrant communities.

Beyond the German “Feuilleton,” (i.e., the high-class daily and weekly press), Kaminer’s oeuvre has attracted the attention of scholars in fields as diverse as German, Slavic, and Comparative Literature Studies. A cursory look over the published articles on Kaminer’s texts

shows an increased scholarly desire to see Kaminer's writings in terms of theories on migration, representation, and hybrid identities as developed within post-colonial cultural and German studies. The extant criticism's emphasis has typically been on Kaminer's reception by the dominant German culture, as well as his impact on the author and how his craft reflects the dynamics of a changing global literature in the German-speaking world. Giacomo Bottá's article "Interculturalism and the New Russians in Berlin" (2006) employs, for example, the idea of interculturality to explicate the interconnectedness of place (Berlin) with the creative practices of the migrant artist. Adrian Wanner's "Wladimir Kaminer: A Russian Picaro Conquers Germany" (2005) also draws attention to the performative character of the identities Kaminer adopts and role-plays in books, on stage, and in his media and public appearances, as well as Kaminer's focus on Russianness in all this. Like Giacomo Bottá, Kathleen Condray's detailed textual analysis in "The Colonization of Germany: Migrant and German Identity in Wladimir Kaminer's *Mein deutsches Dschungelbuch*" (2006) emphasizes one more time the visibility that Eastern European immigrants gain in and through Kaminer's tales. A few years earlier, but still in the vein of postcolonial revisitings, Oliver Lubrich's "Are Russian Jews Post-colonial? Wladimir Kaminer and Identity Politics" (2003) credits Kaminer's hybrid literary and artistic voice with a radical power that destabilizes existing discourses on Jewish, Russian, and German identities in a country shaped by increased immigration. Examining a generally understudied aesthetic mode in migrant writings, that of humor, Julia Baker's "Smiling Bonds and Laughter Frees: Marginal Humor and Modern Strangers in the Works of Hung Gurst and Wladimir Kaminer" (2007) further places the writer and his writings in the literary tradition of subversive humor, which serves as a lens to the establishment of distinct identities and the migration experience in a post-unified Germany.

What becomes obvious is that in each of these individual critical accounts of Kaminer, a reawakened interest in the literary cultures of Eastern Europe, in general, and in Russian Jewry, in particular, figures prominently. Such reawakened interest emerges because each of these critics wishes to continue, broaden, and revisit the critical literary-cultural discourse on emerging (trans)national identities in German-speaking Europe as established by the works of other ethnic minorities, such as German Turks and German Jews. As with Turkish-German literary criticism, scholars interested in Russian-German phenomena combine textual analysis with the broader intellectual currents that originate in postcolonial and poststructuralist conceptualizations of the margins of diaspora and the cultural ‘third space’ of hybridity. Endowed with an appeal of instability and ambivalence, diaspora and hybridity in Kaminer’s writings have acquired a status as spaces of subversion and resistance to dominant hegemonies and paralyzing binaries such as either/or, self/other, us/them, and West/East. Consequently, scholars have underscored Kaminer’s artistic ability to bring together different cultures, languages, and identities in a peaceful coexistence. Missing from these critical accounts of Kaminer is an examination of the ways in which his narratives reflect the tension between national and transnational discourses. This is a tension that at times contributes to and at others undermines transnational modes of identification, but in multifaceted ways that defy normative conceptions of nation, ethnicity, tradition, and the relationality between them. The next section takes up these questions.

## **5.2 THE IMAGININGS OF NEW DIASPORIC COMMUNITIES**

The problem raised by this writer in all its breadth and depth is one that his oeuvre forces on the reader—that of multiple transnational identifications and disidentifications that disrupt the

melting pot as it melts, and highlight, in Salman Rushdie's words, "how *newness* enters the world" (*Imaginary Homelands* 393). What comes to the fore in Kaminer's works, as well as in his public performances, is the writer's desire, like that of many other émigrés who lived through the collapse of communism and its ensuing estrangement and dislocation, to be the possessor of his life story and identity based on common and personal memories, negotiating a place for himself in the present as a place "that does not blur [his] differentness" (Rapoport, "Recollection and Relocation" 93). In thinking about the nature of transnational diaspora that emerges out of the mutual relationship between the local and the global, James Clifford writes in his article "Diasporas" (1994) that contemporary diasporic discourse

articulates, or blends together, both roots and routes to construct what Gilroy describes as alternative public spheres (1987), forms of community consciousness and solidarity that maintain identifications outside the national time/space in order to live inside with a difference. (308)

Clifford's observation is insightful as it accentuates the dynamic nature of diaspora's bound entanglement between persisting collective memories of the homeland, incomplete detachment from the host and the original societies, and an aspiration for a return home. In the case of Germany's Russian diaspora, the possibility of an ultimate return home is ruled out after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s. Born on the Western front of Europe in the 1990s, Kaminer's narratives operate from the standpoint of a *new* imagined diasporic consciousness, whose tie to its no longer existent homeland is a relationship based on a shared historical and political legacy freed from the discursive entrenchments of notions of nation-state and identity in the Soviet Union. Exemplary in this respect is an episode in Kaminer's short story "Russen in Berlin" ("Russians in Berlin") from his first short story cycle *Russendisko* (2000),

where the reader is afforded flashes of insight into traditional forms of anti-Semitism practiced on the political level in the Soviet Union. Because of the Soviet party's determination to erect barriers against Western influences and contacts, the narrator's father, like many Russian Jews, is denied inclusion in the communist party under the pretext that he could always immigrate to Israel. He thus remains "für immer ein Kandidat" ("a candidate forever") (11). However, the advent of the new times in Russia in the 1990s brings him as a Jew his "Freikarte in die große weite Welt" ("free ticket for the big wide world") and with that the freedom to negotiate his own liminal identity as a Russian and a Jew in a way that he finds best fits his view of the world (11). This last point requires further elaboration.

In his study on the discursive construction of Russian Otherness and national identity, Neumann charts out the two discursive trends that informed, in parallel fashion, the historically old ways in which Russians measured and reinvented themselves vis-à-vis an image of Europe. The first trend concerned the Westernizing attitude adopted most lately by Gorbachev's followers and historians like Mikhail Gefter. And the second trend presented a nationalistic stance nourished by figures like Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, Dostoyevsky, and Prince Nikolay Sergeevich Trubetskoi. The latter insisted on Russia's moral superiority, which they saw embodied in the richness of Russian spiritual life and which railed against Western civilization's models and ways of life. The former propagated a vision of the country as a member of the large European family, but the challenge they saw was primarily in finding ways for inclusion into the common house of Europe. Such ways incorporated more often than not the idea of copying and borrowing Western models, an idea that, as I show in Chapter 2, had its historical roots in the public, political, cultural, and academic discourses in the majority of Balkan countries as well.

What distinguishes the current Russian political and academic discourse on Europe from the Balkan one is the realization that in the former, contemporary Europe is not regarded as a coherent and homogeneous whole, to whose expectations Russians are held. Rather, Europe is regarded primarily as a construction composed of various spaces “with neither a clearly identifiable core/center nor stable borders—a perfect example of an ‘empty signifier’ constituting a playground for meaning-making” (Makarychev, “Russia’s Discursive Construction of Europe” 1). While not a new realization, the intricacy of the “meaning-making” process with respect to Russian understanding of an assumed exceptional role and position on the European public scene is novel. This alleged sense of exceptionality is rooted in the nationalistic view prevalent in the Russian political sphere, a view that overrides existing Westernizing attitudes and emphasizes “an unbroken and proud national history,” thereby also strengthening the *unique role*, and *not victimhood*, of the Russian multinational, multicultural, and multi-religious state in European development (Neumann 169). Thus, Gefter remarks on the exceptionality of the Russian nation: “we are not a country. We are *a country of countries*...[sic] a centaur by birth” (qtd. in Neumann 165). Likewise, Russia’s specificity is, for Makarychev, “a double-faced phenomenon” with respect to the articulation of Russia in the European context (3). On the one hand, its exceptionality presupposes a move of inclusion into the larger European whole, for Russia’s history is seen as an organic part of the great European past. On the other, voices in Europe have raised the concern for Russia’s exclusion from the European space because of its alleged uniqueness, one that does not fit the propagated European image or mechanisms within the EU. Both tendencies are prevalent today and are closely connected with the image of Europe that Russian discourse further creates.

With respect to the notion of Russian image-making of Europe, it needs to be

underscored that Russian discourse on Europe today appears to be less about catching up to an old model of an Enlightened Europe (a tendency widespread in the Balkans) than about investing the European space with meanings and discourses that Russians further use and engage to legitimize the existence of Russia's own reinvented image. Historically speaking, this quest for reestablished power and place on the European map certainly points to the imperial mentality of Russian political elites as the heirs of Tsarist Russia and the center of the Soviet Empire. It is a colonial legacy that continues to shape to an extent the public spheres as well and is also visible in the self-understanding of Russian expatriates, like Kaminer, whose positionality as a Russian in Europe is clearly predicated upon the idea of being (at least) equal to Europeans rather than inferior to them (the latter being the servile mentality of Balkan expatriates). As Makarychev remarks, contemporary Russian discourse has created a type of "a new spatial imagery" according to which Europe appears in different versions as a "Europe of colors," a "Europe of dimensions," a "New Europe," or a "False Europe," in the spaces where Russians either assert or distance themselves as they see fit from their own understanding of the global world order (3-14). For example, a "Europe of colors" centers on colors as metaphors for border-redrawings—red, white, gray, or black. Looking at Russian representations of Europe, Russia is positioned at either the red, white or gray zones on the European map, signaling different interpretations of Europe as a way to compensate for Russia's dissimilarity to other EU countries (Makarychev 12). Most interesting in this respect is Russia's rewriting of the "gray zone," seen in its marginal positioning not as indicative of stigmatization, uncertainty and chaos, but as a metaphor of autonomy that opens up potentially constructive spaces for innovation, freedom, and experimentation (Makarychev 4-5). As far as the creation of a "[f]alse and [t]rue Europe" is concerned, the divide signals Russian attempts at mapping out a European cultural landscape

according to a vision of what should be considered “positive,” therefore included, or “negative,” henceforth excluded, in prevailing patterns of Europeanness (Makarychev 12). While these examples are far from exhaustive and can certainly be developed and expanded, this is not my intention in this overview. Rather, the goal of my discussion is to underscore the centrality of Europe in Russia’s discursive construction as a centrality based on the relational positionality of Russians in the context of the EU. Understanding this type of relational positionality may further enable us to recognize and understand how members of Russian diasporic communities in Germany rearticulate visions of Germany, Russia, and Europe as multicentered formations that comprise multilateral cultural, ethnic, historical, and spatial identifications.

As noted earlier, Kaminer, unlike Dinev and Zacharieva, does not embrace the totalitarian past in a way that makes him feel the need to dig through the bitter layers of Russian history. Although linked to the history of the Soviet Union, the identities of his Russian heroes do not evoke associations of inherent hardships and suffering, which can be interpreted as Kaminer’s condemnation of communism. Nor would his narratives evoke a world in which his Russian migrants long for the spiritual uniqueness and moral depth that Russian or Slavic culture presumably embodied; a move that would place Kaminer in the literary tradition promoting Russian universalism. Kaminer’s references to the not-long-gone Soviet reality can, in fact, be seen in their totality as his personal interpretation that escapes the national agenda of Russian diasporism and diasporic radicalism to capture a Soviet way of life that, despite its shortcomings, absurdities, and successes, continues to live in the memories of those who have found another place in the world to call home. Kaminer’s narrator in the story “Die Kosmonauten” (“The Cosmonauts”), which is from his collection of pseudo-autobiographical short stories *Karaoke* (2005), has this to say of the legacy of the Soviet experiment:



Durch die Auflösung ist die Soviet Union mobil geworden und hat sich über die ganze Welt verstreut. Sie lebt weiter im Herzen ihrer ehemaligen Bürger und wird dort bleiben, bis der Letzte, der von sich behaupten kann *Born in the UdSSR* [italics in original], den Löffel abgibt. (177)

With its dissolution, the Soviet Union became mobile and spread out all over the world. She [the Soviet Union] continues to live in the hearts of its former citizens and it will remain until the last, who claims to have been *Born in the USSR*, passes on.

Missing from Kaminer's literary accounts are any references to subjugation or repression, replaced by the embrace of pop-culture and by the humorous and poignant recapitulation of quotidian remembrances and apparently improbable moments whose timeframe spans from the years before the collapse of communism to the intense migration wave westwards, and post-Soviet adventures. One such unthinkable moment concerns the notion of travel during communism. As Karin Taylor remarks, travel and tourism (i.e., sight-seeing tours of national, cultural, and historical monuments and places) played a crucial role for the structural organization of socialist societies and the developing of strong feelings of patriotism in every citizen (*Let's Twist Again* 108). Taylor notes, however, that travel during socialism, despite its high level of state control, could foster a sense of freedom to be "[f]ar away from home, the gaze of the Party—i.e., the eyes of neighbors, colleagues, acquaintances or relatives" (110). The story "Verfehltes Paris" ("Paris Lost") from Kaminer's fourth book *Die Reise nach Trulala* (2004) is interesting in this respect, for it thematizes the sense of false freedom and mobility that the Soviet Party tried to instill in its population. As the story's title suggests, "Verfehltes Paris" centers on the city of Paris or, as we later learn, its counterfeit version that the communist party

built in the southern Russian Steppes near Stavropol in the seventies and where it sent its most distinguished workers on an official excursion. The ridiculousness in the story lies, of course, in the Party's success in creating with its socialist version of Paris a pure tourist simulacrum that offered its quasi tourists the fake experience of the western abroad while protecting them from "den faulen Reizen der westlichen Zivilisation" ("the tainted charms of Western civilization") (27). The existence of this "fast unerreichbares Paradies" ("almost unreachable paradise"), however, comes to an end in the late 1970s when a Dutch journalist accidentally discovers the scam. Although the story makes no grand claims about communism as a system of government, Kaminer's critical stance can be deduced from the tone of the straight-faced irony exuding from his pages. "Verfehltes Paris" thus illustrates Kaminer's parodic take on the communist regime's paranoia related to maintaining a discourse that urged mobility and a sense of freedom while restricting openness within the confines of the homeland, away from the allures of alien cultures.

Such portrayals of Russians' romantic flights into fantasy and illusion bring to mind the stereotypical imagery of life under communism (with its dullness and grayness), which the writer further confronts through his masterful exploitation and multiplication of Russian and German clichés, behaviors, and stereotypes. Laced with a large dose of humor, "Verfehltes Paris" introduces a Russian-colored Parisian reality where the narrator's uncle Boris, armed only with a bottle of vodka and a phrasebook, finds himself among like-minded people. Spending their time in cafés, the Parisian dwellers share a passion for "Vodka mit Bier" ("vodka with beer"), of course not "in solchen Unmengen wie bei uns" ("not in the huge quantities we had back home"), uncle Boris fascinatingly notes, "sondern aus ganz kleinen Gläsern" ("but in tiny little glasses") (23). No wonder the resemblance in habits and customs was so striking, since all of the Parisians were, as the narrator reveals, "Mitarbeiter der Staatssicherheit" ("members of the communist

secret police”) who worked and lived with their families in this fake Paris, were highly educated, and spoke French (22). And in “Verdorben in Sibirien” (“Spoiled in Siberia”), a story featured in the same book collection, the reader ventures out with the passionate biker and the disciplined but also adventurous German Martin, onto Siberia’s steppes to enter a world of impulsiveness, romance, spirits, and spirited hospitality and, “spoiled” by the austere beauty of the land and the rugged nature of the people, only to import this world back into Germany.

To be sure, references to the historical and cultural connections between Russia and Germany are not missing in Kaminer’s literature, and such references certainly position Russia within the European order either more to the East or more to the West depending on how strong the cultural, political, and economic ties were at the time. For instance, the story “Russen in Berlin” is a tale that thematizes Russians’ special relationship to Berlin, which goes back centuries. In the story, the narrator recapitulates the various waves of Russian immigrants to Berlin, from the early 1920s, when Weimar Berlin<sup>39</sup> became a temporary home for Russian intellectual expatriates like Vassili Kandinsky, Marina Zvetayeva, and Vladimir Nabokov, to the

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<sup>39</sup> Kaminer’s invocation of Berlin as a city in and of transformations, easily adjustable to the needs of its diverse population, continues an urban discourse the nature of which calls to mind the multicultural liveliness of Berlin during the Weimar Republic. As the capital of modernism and the avant-garde, 1920’s Berlin became among others *the* most important station for Russian diaspora that fled Russia before the October revolution, the civil war, and its consequences. Out of its hectic flux and artistic vitality, Berlin emerged for many Russian immigrant artists, writers, and thinkers as a place of intellectual exploration and artistic inspiration. Unthinkable without the names of such renowned painters and authors like Vassili Kandinsky, Marina Zvetayeva, Vladimir Mayakovsky, and Vladimir Nabokov, but also without the hundreds of thousands of members of other strata, the Berlin of the 1920s became a vibrant metropolis of its own kind. Known as the “Russian Berlin,” the city represented a Russian cultural microcosm brimming with its own publishing houses, movie theaters, restaurants, newspapers, books, journal, clubs, and other institutions. Yet, the existence of this “Ruskij Berlin” was short-lived and ended with the departure of most of the Russians in the mid-1920s, a demographic change caused not only by the stabilization of the German mark and the consequent higher costs of living but also by the advent of national socialism.

early 1990s, when it again opened its doors for “die Avantgarde der fünften Emigrationswelle” (“the avant-garde of the fifth emigration wave”) (13), that of Russian-Jewish quota refugees, to which the narrator and the writer himself belonged. And if the “Ruskij Berlin” of the 1920s was the place where “ein Stück russischer Kulturgeschichte” (“a piece of Russian cultural history”) was written, today’s Berlin has come to embody a multiplicity of spaces (e.g., Little Istanbul or Little Warsaw), where the stories of whose global urban modernities are created and recorded by the city’s multiple Others, including its Russian migrants (Schlögel, *Berlin, Ostbahnhof Europas* 9).

And very much like Russians, Germans too moved the location of Germany back and forth on the East/West axes of an imaginary European topography depending on their understanding of Germany’s role on the political, cultural, and historical world scene. One thinks of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century German philosophers and writers’ interest in the Orient, most notably India and China, but also in the vast worlds of the Slavs. Known as “the most stereotypically Romantic” of the Heidelberg romantic authors, Novalis expressed in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1802) a utopian vision of a “provincial cosmopolitanism” into which he waded his own image of “a transcendental Orientalism” or what he imagined in the Orient as the antidote to the arch enemies of the Germans at the time—the French and British empires (Kontje, *German Orientalisms* 96). Like Novalis, August Wilhelm Schlegel also stood representatively for the Early Romantic cosmopolitanism. He praised German culture for its openness towards the foreign and tight connections with the past when medieval Europe still stood in its unity with Germany at its core. For Schlegel, as Todd Kontje notes, Germany embodied “der Orient Europas” (“the Orient of Europe”), and it was again up to Germany to unite that which has been disintegrated (91-92). In so doing, Schlegel asserted his vision of a “pan-European cosmopolitanism based on German

leadership” (Kontje 91-92). Unlike Herder before him and his Romantic contemporaries, Goethe did not look in the past but envisioned the present and future as the synthesis between East and West, memorably opining in his *West-östlicher Divan* (1814-1819) that “Wer sich selbst und andere kennt/Wird auch hier erkennen:/Orient und Okzident/Sind nicht mehr zu trennen” (“Those who know themselves and others/Will realize here, too/That the Orient and the Occident/Have become inseparable” (276).

Russians, for their part, were preoccupied with and followed the intellectual thought of the West. Tracing the connections between Russian and German intellectual history, Robert C. Williams notes that the works of idealists and romanticists like Friedrich Schelling and E.T.A. Hoffmann, the philosopher Hegel and the scientist Carl Gustav Carus, whose concepts of the “world soul,” of the unconscious, of the split self, and the German spirit provided writers like Gogol and Belinskii, Berdyaev and Dostoyevski with the language to capture and synthesize through their writings the idea of the Russian soul (“The Russian Soul” 579-585). It was precisely the invention of the legendary Russian popular soul (of the innate goodness of the Russian people) that first helped Russians accentuate their differentness and exceptionality as a country that could rescue the shrinking soul of a dying Europe.

This complex interrelationship of Russian and German, and by extension European, historical and intellectual thought could explain the contemporary popularity of the Russian soul that German critics now saw returning home in the figure and the literature of the émigré Wladimir Kaminer, an allusion that the writer often sustained by calling himself “Der Russe vom Dienst” (“the Russian from central casting”) (Sieglinde *NZZ Online*). German reviewers have indeed introduced Kaminer as “ein guter Russe” (“a good Russian”) (Frank Kell-Behrens), who not only “captur[es the] lost soul of Russia in Berlin” (Kirsten Grieshaber) but also “von uns

[den Deutschen] erzählt” (“tells us about us”), thereby making Germans proud of their “so ulkig banales grossartiges Leben” (“comically banal lovely life”) (Frank Kell-Behrens). The German’s enthusiasm for Kaminer curiously matches the European enthusiasm of the 1880s and 1920s, when Westerners rediscovered in Russian literature, which was brought closer to them through translations and Russian emigration, the Russian soul as a power that would invigorate a whole continent from its spiritual and moral decline. As a French critic remarked in the 1880s, Russians “return to us, if you like, the substance of our own literature of forty or fifty years ago, modified, renewed, enriched through having traversed minds which differ noticeably from ours” (qtd. in Williams 585). It is hardly surprising then that, as Adrian Wanner notes, thanks to his “mildly satirical, but essentially benevolent, depiction of modern Germany as a tolerant multicultural society,” Kaminer has become “the embodiment of the ‘ideal German’” and is therefore often invited by Goethe-Institute centers on reading tours around the world to promote an appreciation of modern German culture (“Russian Hybrids: Makine, Kaminer, and Shteyngart” 675). As far as Kaminer is considered regarding his media image as a successfully integrated Russian immigrant, the writer adopts a rather non-exclusionary stance: “I don’t give a damn about being a model for Russia,” he responds in an interview. “Such labels simply serve the journalistic purpose of dividing humanity” (Antoine, *The European Magazine* n.pag.).

### **5.2.1 Stereotypes Wrapped in “More Colorful Clichés”**

From the variety of topics and physiologies presented to the public,<sup>40</sup> the manipulation of stereotypes in writings and performances, to the modest-looking paperbound pocketsize

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<sup>40</sup> I borrow the term “physiology” from Walter Benjamin’s discussion of the flâneur in the Arcades project and the different “types” or physiognomies of the city and its inhabitants that the Parisian flâneur presented in the form of short pamphlets to his reading audiences. Such types

volumes, it is all a sign of not only a personal choice and authorial taste, but above all of the writer's ability to represent and rearticulate differences in a way that enables him to expose caricatures as misrepresentations of reality where forced binaries compare "us" (the natives) and "them" (the strangers) to the good guys and the bad guys, thereby drawing boundaries between nations, cultures, times, and histories. But as Kaminer suggests, the clichéd images of the infamous Russian soul that his typecasting invokes and combats serve also another function. Of the nature in this cliché, he remarks:

Wir Russen sind schwermütig und trinken viel Wodka. Ich kann auch nicht behaupten, dass das nicht stimmt. Wir wollten dieses Klischee nicht vernichten, sondern vervielfältigen. Nicht alle Russen haben schlechte Laune und besaufen sich mit Wodka. Es gibt auch Russen wie mich, die lieber Wein trinken und eher optimistisch durch die Welt laufen. Es hat keinen Sinn gegen die Klischees zu kämpfen, weil die Menschen Bilder brauchen, um eine Orientierung in diesem bunten Leben zu haben. Deswegen brauchen wir mehr farbige Klischees.

("Russen sind Protesttrinker")

We Russians are melancholic and drink a lot of vodka. I cannot say either that this is not true. We do not want to destroy this cliché but to multiply it. Not all Russians are bad-tempered and get drunk off vodka. There are also Russians like me who like to drink wine and look at the world optimistically. It is useless to

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could range from the figure of the street vendor to the refined visitors of the opera house. In Kaminer, these types encompass both the majority of Germans and the minority of immigrants, refugees, and other ethnicities, whereas representatives from both groups occupy different professional fields and social classes, ranging from health care physicians and publishers, actors and artists, restaurant owners and street sellers, to students and unemployed.

fight against clichés because people need images in order to find orientation in this color-variegated world. That is why we need more colorful clichés.

These words of Kaminer curiously resonate with the words of American journalist of German-Jewish descent, Walter Lippmann, who first coined the term ‘stereotype,’ in his study of public mind and popular consciousness in his book *The Public Opinion* (1922). While today stereotypes are more or less frequently referenced as words of misuse, a phenomenon that stems from the exclusionary experience that minority groups are subjected to by current media, public, and racial discourses, in Lippman’s conception stereotypes are not always associated with negative characteristics. In fact, Lippmann points to the essential usefulness of “simpler models” (16) and “unified impressions” (260) as markers of orientation in a modern human world that he calls “the great blooming, buzzing confusion of reality” (96):

They are an ordered, more or less consistent picture of the world.[...] They may not be a complete picture [...] but they are a picture of a possible world to which we are adapted. In that world people and things have their well-known places, and do certain expected things. We feel at home there. We fit in. We are members. We know the way around. There we find the charm of the familiar, the normal, the dependable; its grooves and shapes are where we are accustomed to find them. [...] It fits as snugly as an old shoe. (95)

Lippmann’s insightful description reflects no doubt the spirit of his era. Writing in the years that followed World War I, Lippmann, like many of his contemporaries, experienced his world as rapidly changing and complex, where global connections have made anonymity an increasingly prominent condition of its time. In such a world, stereotypes functioned as a form of ordering of already existing views, conceptions, patterns, and bits of information into a more coherent



picture of societies to which individuals belonged, in which they lived according to certain beliefs, and where they practiced their traditions. Moreover, the process of ordering these “pictures in our heads” constituted an indelible part of one’s identity, serving as a defense act against anything that endangered “the charm of the familiar.” In this regard, he says:

No wonder that any disturbance of the stereotypes seems like an attack on the foundations of the universe. It is an attack upon the foundations of our universe, and, where big things are at stake, we do not readily admit that there is any difference between our universe and the universe. (60-61)

But how are we to understand Lippmann’s words in the context of Kaminer? For one, the desire to seal off the familiar from the alien is not new and this human characteristic has certainly gained currency in today’s world of global migration when the experience of displacement, loss, and trauma produce “disjunctive temporalities of modernity” (Bhabha 36) that trouble Bhabha’s homogeneity of the nation or Lippmann’s “charm of the familiar.” But it is also a world where the need for redefinition of our tradition, value and belief systems has become as urgent and necessary as is the rediscovery of and fascination with the exotic and unfamiliar as the basis for the formation of presumably stable identities according to categories that are invisible and fluid. And this realization holds true not only for the host cultures but also for the guests who are no longer guests: the foreigner, the migrant, the diasporic individual for whom gaining a foothold in an alien territory involves bringing known and unknown places into single interaction and negotiating past and present memories, old and new prejudices and experiences as part and parcel of our “contrapuntal modernity” (Clifford, “Diasporas” 311). Lippmann maintains that:

a people without prejudices, a people with altogether neutral vision, is so unthinkable in any civilization of which it is useful to think, that no scheme of

education could be based upon that ideal. Prejudice can be detected, discounted, and refined, but so long as finite men must compress into a short schooling preparation for dealing with a vast civilization, they must carry pictures of it around with them, and have prejudices. The quality of their thinking and doing will depend on whether those prejudices are friendly, friendly to other people, to other ideas, whether they evoke love of what is felt to be positively good, rather than hatred of what is not contained in their version of the good. (120)

Lippmann's observations can be aligned to definitions often applied to modern diasporic cultural forms that have emerged from a transnational network of multiple attachments and detachments and exemplify both resistance to and accommodation with the host cultures, their norms, values, and beliefs. What Wladimir Kaminer's words above illustrate is the writer's realization that every society needs to have some relatively stable boundaries and categories (rendered visible by either stereotypes or clichés) that will allow its members to set limits (be they social, economic, or cultural) within which to insert their existence, their sameness, their differentness, and their home. But such stability, Kaminer further suggests, can only be possible and meaningful when it is achieved in a manner that emphasizes the limitations of concepts and the ambiguity of prejudices and is based on mutual agreement rather than obligation. For Kaminer, this means then to mobilize various sets of cultural identities and historical memories through stereotypes wrapped in "mehr farbige[n] Klischees" ("more colorful clichés") and "to play the exotic card" (Haines, "The Eastern Turn" 140) harmlessly and with bonhomie; a strategy of survival that allows him to stay critical yet inoffensive enough within the stipulations of a host culture where norms or definitions are promoted and circulated by those in power.

As explicated in Chapter 3, Dinev also uses a wide range of clichéd images of the Balkans in his writings to expose the sometimes invisible ways in which sharp boundary definitions between the West and the East of Europe were and are being maintained, historically, culturally, socially, and economically. His oeuvre thus fixes primarily on the continued inscription of differences into hierarchies, problematizing the too easy acceptance of new hybrid forms of identities composed of non-identical mutually transforming fragments of experiences, forms, and practices. Zacharieva's authorial strategy is different. She chooses the genre of semi-autobiography to confront the reader with a Balkan narrative about inner and outer estrangement caused by dislocation and inherent isolation, the West's ignorance of the Balkans, the invigorating power of historical memory, and the transformative potential of language shifts. The voice of her heroine is neither compliant nor angry, but marked by an increased awareness of the aporia of the limits of our own understanding and of limitations (ethnic, gender, national, or linguistic) that the diasporic subject confronts in its quest of self-discovery and self-translation. Kaminer for his part creates his own brand of Russianness that is stigmatized neither by troublesome memories of Soviet history nor by the traumatic experience of dislocation and exclusion and escapes both the prejudiced stereotyping of Western and Russian universalisms and the nostalgic vision of diaspora nationalism. And if Dinev and Zacharieva interweave bits of Bulgarian folklore and epic with magic or documentary realism to create evocative prose that shows their readers the modern world through Balkan migrant eyes, Kaminer's approach is to blur the thin line between reality and fiction in seemingly simple, yet beautifully quirky, narration that draws its readers into the pseudo-biography of a constantly mobile and insightful migrant writer flâneur, Wladimir Kaminer. Under his gaze, Berlin, Germany, and by extension, Europe are imagined as contrapuntal modernities composed of multiple competing spaces and

times that are constructed and shared by human beings who are able and more eager to recognize each other in their own differentness, their own strangeness.

### 5.2.2 The Space of Berlin

Each short story cycle by Kaminer thus becomes an artistic enterprise that envisages original spaces and forms of identity created in journeys and dislocation, deconstructing conventional concepts of home, origins, and migration. In his narratives, Kaminer rewrites the figure of Benjamin's flâneur narrator, the dandy who now returns to the Western metropolis as a foreigner and a migrant and strolls leisurely through the streets of the twenty-first century urban Berlin as in *Russendisko* or perambulates aloofly about the provincial areas of the German Republic in *Mein deutsches Dschungelbuch*. Delighting in the emporium of the spectacle of Berlin's event culture, probing his metropolitan surroundings for secret clues and hints, and picturing the country turf as a mysterious landscape, Kaminer creates via his flâneur narrator "panorama stories" that capture the physiognomy of German modern life with its modern strangers.

The short story collection *Russendisko* is Kaminer's first highly illuminating account of his engagement in continual flâneries. In this book, as well as throughout his other writings, the readers acquaint themselves with a narrator flâneur, who is not exhausted by strolling, observing, and reading the signs of the modern metropolis Berlin. In the short story "Geschäftstarnungen" ("Disguised Businesses"), for example, Kaminer's flâneur remarks with the purposeful gaze of the detective: "Berlin ist eine geheimnisvolle Stadt. [...] Nichts ist hier echt, jeder ist er selbst und gleichzeitig ein anderer" ("Berlin is a mysterious city. [...] Nothing is real here; everybody is himself and at the same time somebody else.") (98). And in another story, "Doppelleben in Berlin" ("Double Life in Berlin"), he continues to decipher: "Ganz anders ist es hier, wo man

unter Umständen mehrere Leben gleichzeitig führen kann, sein eigenes und das eines anderen. Für Menschen, denen ein solches Doppelleben gefällt, ist Berlin die ideale Stadt” (“It is very different here, where under circumstances one leads many lives at the same time, his own life and that of somebody else. Berlin is the ideal city for people, who like such double lives”) (127). Both an exterior and interior, “knowable and known, and [...] mysteriously alien and fantastic” (Rignall, “Benjamin's *Flâneur*” 113-114), Berlin’s setting foregrounds a space of negotiation and social interaction where prescribed limits of multicultural existence are played out and frequently transgressed by groups and individuals.

Consequently, the im/migrants and minorities in Kaminer’s ethnographic jungle Berlin—“all wandering people who will not be contained within the *Heim* of the national culture—,” bear the marks of the shifting boundary of the modern nation (Bhabha 236). In “Geschäftstarnungen,” for example, the narrator discovers that many owners of international businesses in Berlin have unstable national identities: Indians reveal themselves as Tunisians from Cartage; Italian restaurant owners are Greeks; Greeks are Arabs, and “[s] elbst das letzte Bollwerk der Authentizität, die Zigarettenverkäufer aus Vietnam [kommen] mehrheitlich aus der inneren Mongolei” (“[e]ven the last bulwark of authenticity, the cigarette vendors from Vietnam actually come from inner Mongolia”) (98-99). Such amalgamation between the people and the spaces that Kaminer’s immigrants navigate and populate implicates a destabilization of received identities as it foregrounds the mutable and performative character of identity. While external forces such as state institutions, the economic market, and social movements could require a degree of performance, the shortcomings of their logic, as Kaminer’s narratives seem to suggest, provide some room for agency, a space from which his immigrant characters are able to maneuver the system to their benefit. Kaminer’s Russian émigrés too are capable of developing a flexible

identity through a number of practices. The reader encounters former archeologists as tailors, unemployed professors of pedagogy working in day care, and students in Slavic making a career as peanut street vendors. In this sense, Kaminer's characters, like Dinev's Bulgarian would-be Polish workers or Greek and Italian taxi drivers, find a place of existence through navigating familiar and foreign territories, constantly mobilizing and recombining existing cultural and ethnic resources and knowledge as a transnational mode of survival.

What distinguishes Kaminer's from Dinev's migrant depictions is the realization that Kaminer's migrants' existence is less influenced by the East-West European symbolic geographical hierarchy, which forces Dinev's characters to either lose themselves in their ceaseless metamorphoses or choose in the end one identity over the other. Kaminer's characters, by contrast, are involved in a freer play of detachments and elective affinities to different ethnicities and cultures, and their existence is not afflicted by nostalgia or a desire for a return home. This observation also holds true for the writer Kaminer, whose self-fashioning as a German writer and a Russian is based on his relational positionality with respect to German and Russian dimensions that open up spaces for multilateral identifications, not identities, with partially connected histories, ethnicities, cultures, times, and spaces. Such relational positionality is evident in Kaminer's own self-understanding:

Meine Heimat ist die Sowjetunion, wie ich sie aus meiner Kindheit im Herzen trage. Privat bin ich Russe. Beruflich bin ich deutscher Schriftsteller. Und mein Lieblingswohntort ist Berlin. ("Interview mit Wladimir Kaminer")

My homeland is the Soviet Union, the way I carry it in my heart from my childhood. Privately, I am a Russian. Professionally, I am a German writer. And my favorite place of residence is Berlin.

Kaminer's words convey James Clifford's vision of a world that exists "after" divisions: Russians versus Germans, East versus West, hosts versus migrants (327). Such borderline vision is unthinkable, however, without the recalling of older histories of transnational contacts or the evocation of the hegemonizing effect of national or ethnic discourses. For Kaminer as well as for his migrant characters, ethnicity becomes detached from its roots and emerges as *a cultural good* that circulates, an accessory they wear, put on the walls, or trade in a way that their public and clients find attractive and acceptable. A point in case is Kaminer's *Russendisko*, a book, a CD, a DJ night, a website, and a multimedia event, which together take the borderline condition to its global limit. With its Soviet red star logo, leftover decoration materials from the GDR era, and provocative taglines for public appearances like "Der Russe kommt" ("The Russian is coming"), Kaminer's *Russendisko* becomes the original scene of the "migrant" everyday, the pastiche of Russian authenticity, and the spectacle of Russian and German stereotypes. His art does not grieve a world that has been lost, but refigures the past as an in-between space that ruptures the present, and, thus, visualizes the contrariness of modern life. This is how Kaminer's narrator characterizes his *Russendisko* initiative: "Genau dafür hatten wir uns die Russendisko ja ausgedacht: um all das zusammenzuführen, was nicht zusammengehört" ("It is exactly for this reason that we came up with Russian disco: to bring together that which does not belong together") (*Schönhauser Allee* 74). *Russendisko* thus features new tactics of hope that prefigure loss and survival and point to a cultural syncretism that assumes a form of a shared necessity, not of a *nOstalgie*,<sup>41</sup> of living.

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<sup>41</sup> The word plays with the German term "Ostalgie" ("nostalgia for the East [Ost]") that has been frequently used in former communist countries like East Germany and Poland to describe a general feeling of longing for an irretrievably lost communist past, way of life, and values. "Ostalgie" has also been thematized and counteracted in movies and literature. Most notable, in this respect, are German writer Thomas Brussig's novel *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee*

This is not to say, however, that Kaminer's migrants just choose and put on new identities as they please. Like every embodied subject who inhabits actual physical and virtual social spaces, they too need to negotiate, at sometimes a high price, the material basis of their quotidian reality (i.e., their right to a work, private, and legal existence). Threatened by deportation, one of his characters in the story "Spring aus dem Fenster" ("Jump from the Window") (*Russendisko*) follows a friend's advice and eludes the police through his apartment window but breaks his leg, and another, in "Die russische Braut" ("The Russian Bride") (*Russendisko*), gets involved in the Russian bride industry in order to receive a stay permit. And yet another in "Der Radiodoktor" ("The Radio Doctor") (*Russendisko*) tries to pass as a doctor whose radio broadcasts give his Russian audience, looking for home remedies and natural cure, a false sense of comfort and wellbeing. Nonetheless, Kaminer's characters' positioning in the host society is "not a process of absolute Othering, but rather of entangled tension" (Clifford 307). That is, having experienced dislocation and economic insecurity, to articulate one or another identity or location is to place them in tension, by constantly rearranging the bits of discrepant experiences and pieces of opportunities available at hand. As one of Kaminer's Russian characters remarks about his ways of managing an international cuisine: "man muss nur die richtigen Saucen kennen" ("one just needs to know the right sauces") ("Der Russenmafiapuff," *Russendisko* 105). The sauce metaphor can thus be seen as a further index for the ways in which migrants create spaces for themselves in competing environments. These spaces remain highly unstable, and, for this reason, difference does not disappear but, like the sauce, adds extra flavor

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(1999) and its film adaptation *Sonnenallee* (*Sun Alley* 1999) as well as the movie *Good Bye, Lenin* (2003). *Das Leben der Anderen* (*The Lives of Others* 2006) can be seen rather as a counter-example of "Ostalgie."



and change and is constantly reinterpreted, contested, and reconfigured, without instilling in the reader a sense of forced hierarchies.

As a multicultural city surveyor, Kaminer's foreign narrator's expertise lies in his ability to discover the differences that exist between metropolitan landscapes and cultures. His investigations of the peculiarities of Berlin as the locus for the formation of multilateral identifications further serve to contour his view of Germanness, what is Germany and what is German. Told in a witty way, "Geschäftstarnungen" ("Disguised Businesses"), for instance, ends with the narrator's wondering who "die sogenannten Deutschen" ("the so-called Germans") really are and what might be hiding behind the pleasant "German" façades of bars (99). In the metaphoricity of the facades of German bars, a tension arises with the very concept of homogenous national cultures or organic ethnic communities. Kaminer further destabilizes the idea of nation as "an a priori historical presence" (Bhabha 211) in the story "Doppelleben in Berlin" ("Double Life in Berlin"). While on an urban exploration with his mother, Kaminer's flâneur encounters Mrs. Wolf, the chubby clerk at the local branch of his bank Sparkasse, dancing in one of the countless audio ballets in Berlin. As the narrator says,

Jeden zweiten Abend zieht sie ein Tutu aus Plexiglas an, in dem Aufnahme- und Wiedergabegeräte eingebaut sind. Dann wackelt Frau Wolf leicht mit dem Hintern, dabei werden ihre Bewegungen aufgenommen, in eine Art Musik umgewandelt, die aus dem Tutu kommt und sodann den Rhythmus für den Tanz der Truppe vorgibt. Wie verrückt springt Frau Wolf zusammen mit anderen Anlageberaterinnen auf der Bühne herum und vergisst sich völlig. (128)

Every second evening, she puts on a tutu from Plexiglas with built in microphones and receivers. Then Frau Wolf shakes her booty, whereby her movements get

recorded and transformed into a kind of music that comes from the tutu and determines the rhythm for the group dance. Frau Wolf jumps like crazy on the stage along with other investment consultants and forgets herself completely.

Frau Wolf's escape or disguise from her professional identity finds an equivalent in Mr. Heisenberg, a job consultant at Berlin's employment center and who seems, at first glance, to be a run of the mill German passionate about reasoning and art. At night, however, our narrator sights Mr. Heisenberg dressed in jeans and a leather jacket, enjoying the company of a young man from Thailand in a gay bar in Berlin Mitte. As with the case of migrant identity, the story promotes the splitting of the national subject, suggesting that Germans likewise position themselves in a relationship towards themselves and their cultural, gendered, and professional surroundings.

### **5.2.3 From the Space of Berlin into the Space of Germany**

This shift in perspectives, from a homogenous to a heterogeneous image of a nation's people, is perhaps best captured in the form of humorous travelogues in Kaminer's seventh book *Mein deutsches Dschungelbuch*. Here, the liminal figure of the German nation-space is bared in the eyes of an author intent on his reading tours throughout Germany:

Ich schrieb an meinem Buch weiter, suchte nach typischen Merkmalen, nach  
Allgemeinheiten und geistigen Knotenpunkten, die dieses Land zusammenhielten.  
Das, was ich fand, war oft skurril, manchmal erstaunlich und natürlich immer sehr  
subjektiv. (11)

As I was working on my book, I kept looking for typical features that held this country together. What I found was oftentimes bizarre, sometimes astonishing, and always very subjective.

Moving away from the heterotopias (Foucault) of Berlin, the writer narrates the hybrid story of “nationness” as found within the disseminated reality of the provinces and the rural areas in Germany:

Je länger ich durch Deutschland toure, umso rätselhafter wird dieses Land. Die Konturen seiner Leitkultur werden durch unzählige Baustellen bestimmt. Alles wird abgerissen und um- oder wieder aufgebaut. (139)

The longer I travel through Germany, the more mysterious this country becomes. The contours of its *Leitkultur* are marked by countless work sites. Everything is being torn down and then rebuilt and reconstructed.

The former East German city and landscape are also refigured in the image of the construction site: Kassel is destined to give up with its symbol for free human spirit—the monument “Die Treppe ins Nichts” (“The Stairwell into the Nothing”); Halle is famed for its “Betonfahne” (“concrete flag”) recently renamed into “Europafahne” (“European flag”); in Schwerin, numerous colored cranes serve as orientation marks; and in Erfurt, it is the improvised wooden “krumme Brücke” (“twisted bridge”) that takes tourists and locals from one shore of the Gera river to the other (139-140). Such progression of spatial images from steps and flags to cranes and bridges recovers the traces of the former communist state experience and further creates a metaphor for the boundaries of the now unified German nation-state and culture, which also need to be rethought and redefined. Thus, the stairwell as a liminal space leads into nothing, and the bridge, which “gathers as a passage that crosses” is twisted (Bhabha 7). What this example

shows is that as Kaminer's 'new' internationalism moves from the materiality of places that constitute a concept of *Heimat* to the metaphoric aspects of *home*, the process of transition is not smooth.<sup>42</sup> Instead, it speaks to the need for a revision of national space, suggesting that *home*, like identity, is not a motionless space, but consists of many social spaces that are constantly adapted and reconfigured by the individuals inhabiting these spaces.

The individuals that inhabit these spaces are not only the natives, the Germans, but also the immigrants who have also established a second and a third *Heimat* in the German provinces by investing labor and creating emotional ties to their communities. From the teenagers of Turkish-German descent in Böblingen (30) and the terrorist-looking Yugoslav hotel owners in Waldbröl, to the Siberian street musician in Grevenbroich (104) and Saddam Hussein's

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<sup>42</sup> "Heimat" ("homeland") occupies the center of a discourse that has endured and been constantly redefined in German philosophical, theoretical, and literary thought from Herder's German romanticism through Nietzsche's mythicism and the Third-Reich's *völkisch*-nationalism to West German traditionalism and East German socialism. As Elizabeth Boa notes, a spatial-temporal metaphor, *Heimat* has come to signify family, locale, tradition, dialect, folklore, race, cuisine, behavior, etc., in short everything that would enclose the individual, the self, and protect the integrity of the "Gemeinschaft" ("organic community") from identity-threatening sources like the disrupting arrival of strangers, the alienating and deindividuation effects of modernization and globalization, the disorienting experience of travel and dislocation, or in times of crisis and war (64). Frequently invoked in oppositions (city vs. province, modernity vs. tradition, familiar vs. alien, order vs. chaos), *Heimat* thus signals the desire to re-embed what has been misplaced (i.e. as a space of return—"Heimkehr"), to reconnect (as a transcendental quality and a mythic union) what has been disintegrated but naturally belongs together, to provide secure shelter and peace of mind to that which has been shattered. Important in this context is the cultural construction of specific *Heimat* imagery that has been perpetuated and promoted in film, literature, or political propaganda. From the sights of the idyllic German Alps and countryside, the sounds of German folk songs and television shows to the familiar smells and tastes of local foods, drinks, and childhood homes, writers, filmmakers, and politicians constructed symbols of identity and boundaries around and within which the worlds of Germanness, the German nation and the German home evolved. Taken as a whole, *Mein deutsches Dschungelbuch* can be seen as the writer's attempt at rewriting or revisiting from a non-German's point of view the primacy of the modern German province in the reclamation of the German nation over cosmopolitanism, Germanness over foreignness, rootedness over uprootedness, and *Heimat* over homelessness. Many of the episodes reference cultural inheritances, towns, cities, landscapes, dialects, culinary customs, and boundaries that invoke known tropes of the German *Heimat* discourse, only to deconstruct them later in the stories.

Doppelgänger, the Indian and Arab food stand sellers in Hiddensee (40-41), Kaminer's narrator unveils the many foreign faces that make out the hidden dimensions of a transnational Germany and point towards the successful or less successful imbrications of foreigners into the country's multicultural fabrics. And while Kaminer's interrogations into the localized experiences of urban life in *Russendisko* suggested the limited rootedness of modern individuals, his German jungle book illustrates how Germanness and German mattered more in the towns and villages of Germany's regions than they did in urbane, metropolitan Berlin: The notion of belonging and the missing conditions of *Anerkennung*, or recognition, which put the process of othering, of 'us' versus 'them,' into motion, are more pronounced here.

Indeed, the different episodes in the book invoke a whole array of boundaries—country versus city, province versus metropolis, and tradition versus modernity, and suggest ways in which German populations in the provinces today view non-native German speakers (and authors) as different from themselves, and, in so doing, give a clearer shape and meaning to their Germanness. Of course, such a move should be seen as far less explicit and dominant than the essentialized understanding of previous forms of national identity. It nonetheless points to existing asymmetrical power relations that are still tricky to tackle. One of these strategies includes the lack of recognizing the ties that bind German dominant culture with its foreigners and their cultural practices, emphasizing instead the imagined boundaries separating the majority from the minority. In the story "Vodka Sekt" ("Vodka Champagne"), Kaminer's invocations of the clichéd images that the regional press uses to advertise non-German writers and attract local audiences suggest how this is accomplished. Introduced as a "Deutscher Autor rissischer Abstammung" ("German writer of Russian origin") or "ein jüdischer Schriftsteller" ("a Jewish writer") or with phrases such as "Der Russe kommt" ("The Russian is Coming"), Kaminer's

narrator becomes the carrier of his gloomy immigrant heritage that constantly separates him from the host culture as a foreigner and highlights his Otherness (117). It is therefore not surprising that at many of his reading tours, he is confronted with comments and questions that reactivate the us/them dichotomy: “Sie sind ein Russe und wir sind Deutsche” (“You are a Russian and we are Germans”) (194) and allude to the fact that German culture continues to be perceived as essentially bound to a certain territory: “Wie gefällt es Ihnen hier bei uns in Deutschland?” (“How do you like it here in our Germany?”) (11). As expected, Kaminer’s narrator refuses to engage in such binary thinking models, which would otherwise define him in some territorialized terms of the nation-state. To avoid any competing attempts to define Germanness, Russianness, or foreignness, his answers further stress the reciprocal aspect of cultural relativism: “Das kann man so sehen” (“You can look at it this way”) (195) and the illusionary nature of German homogeneity:

Je kleiner der Ort, umso überzeugter waren die Bewohner, dass sie im einzig wahren Deutschland lebten. Aber zwanzig Kilometer weiter sah dieses Deutschland schon ganz anders aus. (11)

The smaller the town, the more convinced its inhabitants are that they live in the only real Germany. Yet, twenty kilometers further away, Germany already looks completely different.

#### **5.2.4 From the Space of Germany into the Space of Europe**

Kaminer’s uncentered pluralist view of home, nationness, foreignness, or Germanness is further translated into the writer’s attempt to envision an alternative space of belonging and identity, an imaginary space that goes beyond the regional confines of Germany to encompass the wider

unhomely boundaries of multiple European modern worlds. The concept of *unhomeliness* implies in general the termination of one's connections to his or her home. In recent years, *unhomeliness* has received a more positive appeal in the postcolonial writings of Homi Bhabha. Drawing on Freud's semantically rich concept of the *unheimlich*, Bhabha interprets in *The Location of Culture* the notion of *unhomeliness* not in terms of the "homeless" but as the "unhomed": an individual who resists an easy assimilation into some kind of predetermined territories or norms of social and cultural life. Positioned in the interstice between the familiar and the foreign, the *unhomely* subject thus inhabits, for Bhabha, a borderline zone in which "home and world become confused; and [...] the private and the public become part of each other" (9). Such is the world of modern Europe where the shifting, disappearing, and reappearing geopolitical, social, and cultural borders bring to light that which the Westerner has repressed or othered. This is the story of Kaminer's internationals in his fourth travelogue in "Verlaufen in Dänemark" ("Lost in Denmark"), featured in *Die Reise nach Trulala*. Here, the "act of writing the world, of taking the measure of its dwelling" (Bhabha 12) within the blurred boundaries of an unhomely Europe is dexterously captured in Kaminer's description of Copenhagen's transnational life-world and "das russische Haus" ("The Russian House") in the city's neighborhood Christiania.

The story recapitulates the hitchhiking adventures of the writer and his friend, Andrej, who set out to explore "das nächstbeste westliche Ausland" ("the next best western abroad"), Denmark (141). The roads take them to Copenhagen's Christiania, where globality has left its indelible mark on the city district's socioscape: The inhabitants in Christiania, the reader learns, range from professional drug dealers, hippies from different countries, Danish pensioners, Hungarian prostitutes to North German anarchists with white beards and black dogs. Once in the

“Russian house,” Wladimir and his friend find themselves in an enclosed world that presents, like Thomas Mann’s *Der Zauberberg* (*The Magic Mountain* 1924), a miniature version of a cosmopolitan community where the challenging modern experience of the Western and Eastern worlds has been constituted. The diverse individuals, including Americans, Russians, and Dutch mixed with Germans, Finns, Africans, and Hungarians, who have gathered in this “Paradies der Erwerbslosen” (“paradise of the unemployed”) (161) function as a simulacrum of an international assemblage, the parody of which lies in the joint that binds them together:

Im großen Garten des russischen Hauses saßen zwei Dutzend Männer und Frauen an einem Lagerfeuer, tranken Wein aus großen Plastikgallonen und unterhielten sich auf Englisch. Eine riesige Wasserpfeife mit mehreren Schläuchen ragte aus der Erde. [...] Andrej und mir kam es so vor, als würden wir als unabhängige Beobachter einer UNO-Konferenz zum Thema ‘Drogen und Weltfrieden’ teilnehmen. (158)

In the big garden of the Russian house, there were two dozen men and women sitting around the campfire, drinking wine out of big plastic bottles, and chatting in English. A huge hookah stuck out from the ground. [...] It seemed to Andrej and me as if we were participating as independent observers in a UNO conference on a theme “Drugs and World Peace.”

Lacking a sense of time, the residents of the Russian house follow their own rhythm of life detached from reality. Similar to Mann’s character, Hans Castorp, Kaminer’s dwellers abandon practical life to submit to the illusiveness, not of disease, but of freedom that the existence abroad and marijuana bring about. As they engage in repetitive conversations about horses, trees, Mickey Mouse, and the bloodthirstiness that their ancestors shared during WWII, this



international crowd takes clichés and stereotypes to the extreme, only to dismantle them under the diplomatic power of hashish. Once “Weltfrieden” (“world peace”) is established, Beatles music and African dance and singing replace the awkward “battle scenes” discussions giving foreign flavor to a diverse borderline existence.

The Russian house can be read as Kaminer’s desire to model a “discursive ‘image’ [of a Euro-Russian world], of dwelling at home, while producing an image of the world of history” (Bhabha 13). In a way, Kaminer’s interpretation comes close to the idea of “the all-European house” that former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev envisioned in his speech in Prague in 1987, a vision that has since been forgotten. For Gorbachev, the “all-European house”:

signifie[d], above all, the acknowledgment of a certain integral whole, although the states in question belong to different social systems and are members of opposing military-political blocs standing against each other. This term include[d] both current problems and real possibilities for their solution. (qtd. in Svec, “The Prague Spring” 990)

Of course, when Gorbachev made this statement it certainly reflected the spirit of the era: the collapse of the Soviet state happened at the same time with the dynamic rise and strengthening of the EU. But Gorbachev’s vision bares resemblance to contemporary efforts to imagine a common European space that houses particular national and localized notions with global networks of trade, intra- and inter-European migration, and communication. As a site of “extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations,” Europe is an unhomely space, in Homi Bhabha’s sense (13). Viewed from these two angles then, Kaminer’s Russian House exemplifies the writer’s recognition of the growing diverse global community that can only insufficiently be framed in a manner that extends the imaginary boundaries of Europe from its Western centers into the

imagined territories of Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia, or the Americas, thereby blurring the us/them, private/public, and in/out dichotomies. It is a space made out of frictions and uncomfortable situations affected by the memories of historical conflicts and divisions within and across nations, cultures, and pasts. At times, the identities of Kaminer's characters are more distinct in their aspiration to recapitulate the experiences of their own generations and that of their parents and grandparents. At other times, their identities are more ambiguous as his characters are unable to maintain fully their loyalty to a given culture or nation. Kaminer's account thus gives expression to a new discordant imaginary that is reterritorialized beyond and across officially and legally recognized strictures. And who could lace this vision with a more colorful but also subversive metaphor than the friend of the tale's narrator, Andrej?!

"Christiania—die ganze Welt in einem Joint" ("Christiania – the whole world in one joint") is thus not a narrative of enticing harmonization but mediates the lived tension of heterogeneous and diverse existences, a tension that is further relaxed by the joint that links people together in their (hi)stories, memories, aspirations, hopes, anguish, and fears (161).

### **5.3 COSMOPOLITAN FUTURES**

Kaminer's texts display keen observation and a deep understanding of humor's power to subvert the status quo and of laughter's to help us cope with tragedy, especially when marginality, instability, and exclusion are at play. Like many of his contemporaries, the cosmopolitan Kaminer experiences the world as random and contingent rather than defined. Ulrich Beck notes, "The cosmopolitan perspective, with its sense of erosion of frontiers, points to a highly ambivalent reality and future" ("Cosmopolitical Realism" 150). In tune with Beck's statement,

Kaminer's open-ended stories indeed defy the idea of happy endings, thereby revealing the author's conscious awareness of the indeterminacy of futures and meanings. As Kaminer remarks in an interview:

Meine Geschichten enden eigentlich alle gar nicht, wie im Leben, wo immer alles weitergeht. Es gibt keine Happy Ends, es ist alles ungemein traurig, aber auch rührend zugleich und auch lustig dadurch. ("Rührend ist lustig")

My stories actually never end, like in life, where everything goes on. There are no happy endings; everything is extremely sad, but also moving at the same time and therefore funny.

Yet behind the ostensible non-seriousness that exudes from his pages, the critical, oftentimes Orwellian undertones are hardly muted. Kaminer's literary oeuvre makes a mockery of any deep aspirations for freedom, security, and stability his immigrants share. Laughter and humor are thus his authorial I's preferred offensive gesture, which topples barriers and invites the German audience to step into the liminal world of 'modern strangers.' This is done "not [always] in the name of the passing thrill of the exotic and the temporary attraction of alterity," but also in order to get to know the foreigners, their histories, their identities, and their reasons to be there (Chambers, *Culture After Humanism* 171). "Ich wasche alle Ausländer sauber," Kaminer empathetically observes, embracing tolerance for pluralism. "Ich finde, daß nicht alle Menschen geliebt werden müssen, aber toleriert. Das auf jeden Fall" ("I wash all foreigners. I do not think that all people need to be loved, but tolerated. This in any case") ("In der 'Russendisko'" n.pag.).

Kaminer's visions of Berlin, Germany, and Europe as sites of production of overlapping crosscultural encounters further place the writer within the context of hybrid and cosmopolitan identities, places, and spaces. In his interviews and public life as well as in his writings, Kaminer

reveals himself to be a skillful manipulator of stereotypes of Russian and German identity; a strategy of survival that allows him to create his own cool version of “the Russian” in the interstices of a range of practices. Whether we call him Russian, German, or Jewish, this hybrid writer and hyphenated self “hör[t] auf jeden Namen” (“answer[s] to every name”), as the story “Vodka Sekt” in *Mein deutsches Dschungelbuch* suggests (117). Further, Kaminer’s entrepreneurial skills are remarkable. Every new book is followed by a reading tour with a DJ party afterwards, which in turn transforms the promotion into a multimedia “event” worthy of sub-cultural and bohemian credibility (Bottá, “Interculturalism and New Russians in Berlin” 6). As Giacomo Bottá points out, Kaminer’s “attitude as a performer is [...] strikingly low profiled and relaxed, celebrating humorously his own amateurism and marking continuously his condition of immigrant and outsider” (6). In fact, in an interview Kaminer refers to himself as one of the “slam writers, people who write short stories, what we call “rock’n’roll” literature, that is literature with ‘drive,’ that communicates directly with the reading public, a kind of new urban realism” (“Words without Borders” n.pag.). Situated in the “now” of Germany’s “Erlebnisgesellschaft” (“event culture”) and as a part of it, his short story cycles thus reflect the author’s vision of a transnational, globalized, and multiethnic European community, inflected with Russian and German nuances. Acknowledging the fact that nations are bound by history and deliberately drawing on pop culture (the mixed style of DJ music, language as everyday practice, etc.), Kaminer creates a border art that engages its audience in a constant dialogue, in which readers participate in the process of generating meaning: how identities, communities, and belongings are shaped today, according to (trans)national and (trans)regional systems and values. His emphasis on cultural difference as the binding principle between disparate peoples and cultures and not national identity opens a discursive space where the constructedness of the

subject matters as much as its representation. With his fundamentally global view of the modern worlds, Kaminer's artistic ability has helped, in this sense, to constitute a transnationally emerging literature that articulates the present and future of new modes of identification in the age of globalization.

## **6.0 AFTERWORD: TOWARDS A ‘VITAL PARLIAMENT’ OF DISCIPLINES AND CULTURES**

My study represents the first in-depth analysis of the Balkan trope of Otherness in the sphere of German-language migrant literature produced at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. My starting point was the premise that the historical and cultural legacy of Eastern Europe and the Balkans at this point in time was a largely underresearched and marginal issue in fields in the Western humanities, such as literary and cultural studies. Its continuous peripheral status, I contend, survived because of the larger processes of Western misrepresentations (in the fields of politics, journalism, and the public sphere) that fixated the internal Otherness of these regions as just-the-way-it-is. What followed was the uncritical acceptance of sets of useful but less productive explanations of Eastern Europe and the Balkans’ cultural alterity, explanations that were based on: 1) the enduring simplification of the division of the world into the West and the rest, the latter seen as a discrete, singular East, and; 2) the fact that the Muslim Orient is construed as the primary reference point in literary and cultural debates concerned with the notion of Otherness. As my critical overview of the historical and epistemological conundrum of Balkan and Eastern European subjectivity and patchwork in Chapter 2 showed, the application of postcolonial concepts like hybridity and in-betweenness as they emerged in the North American academy has a limited conceptual scope with regard to Balkan migrant writings because they capture only one small aspect of the voices and memories of “translated and transplanted [Balkan] subjects” (Seyhan, *Writings Outside the Nation* 9). Consequently, I argue that what is needed instead is a

better-informed approach that takes into account not only the theoretical gains of postcolonial and Western thought, but also other methodological frameworks of alterity and subjectivity as they have developed in marginal disciplines like Balkan Studies, for instance. In conclusion, I want to highlight how my analysis of works by “lesser” émigrés from Europe’s edges offers new perspectives in rethinking the theoretical paradigms that German scholars (Leslie Adelson, Azade Seyhan, Hiltrud Arens, Venkat Mani, and others) have created with respect to recent economically motivated immigration to the German-speaking world, in particular Turkish-German transnational literature.

My textual analysis first showed that through their thematic depictions of the migrant’s everyday struggle for survival, Dimitre Dinev, Rumjana Zacharieva, and Wladimir Kaminer partake of the contemporary literary discourse on intra-European migration and minority issues in Germany, as set by their predecessors—the representatives of *Gastarbeiterliteratur* (*guest workers’ literature*). As part of this discourse, these writers’ works, along with Turkish-German cultural productions, reshape the canons of Germanic national literatures and cultures, because they reflect: 1) present concerns regarding the destabilization of rigid forms of thinking, and; 2) the negotiation of multiple/hybrid identities and experiences triggered by the geographical, cultural, social, and linguistic shifts that diverse migrant individuals undergo.

The present study also demonstrates, however, that the oeuvres of the three Eastern European expatriates—the Bulgarian-born German and Austrian writers Rumjana Zacharieva and Dimitre Dinev and the Russian-German Wladimir Kaminer—emerged as exemplary literary mediations of the experience of migration from Eastern to Western Europe and transnational identities. It became evident that Dinev and Zacharieva’s narratives introduce a Balkan dimension regarding the formation of modern subjectivities *beyond* a national focus. And this

dimension has to do not only with the specificity of the writers' migratory experience, but also with the geographical and historical positionality of Bulgaria as the epitome of the Balkans. We recall from my discussion of Rumjana Zacharieva's *Bärenfell* in Chapter 4 Maria Todorova's claim that, from all the countries on the Balkan Peninsula, it is only Bulgaria that has fully identified itself with its Balkanness, politically, nationally, historically, and culturally. Such acceptance of the Balkan name has to do with the geographic centrality of the Balkan Mountains, whose image became one of the most aestheticized metaphors for national liberation, free spirit, and Balkan identity in the history of Bulgarian literature and national consciousness. Of course, disassociations with Balkan backwardness and barbarity are not missing, and they are usually activated in discussions regarding one's claims of Europeanness. As I have shown, this ambiguous Balkan aspect is both thematically and discursively present not only in the writings of Dinev and Zacharieva, but also in the works of other Bulgarian expatriates in France.

Chapters 3 and 4 were devoted to examining how Dinev and Zacharieva's bilingual texts negotiate the experience of migration westwards and envision specific kinds of Balkan subjectivities as a response to opposing representations of the Balkans and the West, or in more general terms, of the Orient and the Occident. My aim was to make the case that the historical modalities touched upon in these writers' fiction matter in the narrative negotiation of identity and migration as such modalities represent an important point that scholars have not fully considered, yet it is an essential element in transnational encounters. It is a point that poses multiple questions that range from notions of exclusion and trauma, memory and alterity, to the lasting significance of imperial legacies on the formation of past and present identities. To bring this point home, my textual analysis demonstrates how Dinev and Zacharieva's narratives of belonging and survival thematize the specific nature of the Balkan historical and political



development as their texts emerge from the writers' heightened awareness of the region's long imperial history, which includes the Ottoman and Soviet empires and Western hegemony. The project is the first to acknowledge the importance of the discourse on the Balkans that, although excluded from the center of Western academic disciplines, has offered valuable insight into: 1) the construction of the Balkan subaltern imaginary as the European "Orient within" and; 2) how this discursive imaginary is reflected in and influences the fictional negotiation of the experience of migration and identity along and across existing asymmetries of power as they relate to both the cultures of origin (periphery) and that of the host (center).

My exploration of Balkan literature and Balkan subjectivity in its own right and in relation to Germany, Austria, and the Former Soviet Union further elucidates how borders can be imagined both as self-sustaining ideological lines of outer and inner entrapments and as lines subject to crossings, openings, and transgressions. In capturing the ongoing reproduction of successive East-West hierarchical imaginaries in current European thought, Dinev breathes tension into his fictional dreamlands of transnational European (Austrian/German) and Balkan (Bulgarian) identities. It is a tension that is born in the forms of knowledge created in the contact between the host countries and their marginal groups that the former have rendered backward and peripheral by means of political, historical, economic, or cultural domination. The voices of Dinev's characters thus carry the traumatic experience and stigma of Balkan ambiguity and splintered subjectivity into the contemporary great narratives of displacement and dislocation in order not so much to offer an alternative to prevailing cultural identities and practices in the West, but to give an expression to the continuous Balkan discursive marginality that would otherwise remain unnoticed in the German-language literary-cultural and public debates concerned with alterity and representation.

Searching for her own horizon of freedom, Zacharieva's character goes beyond the explicit and implicit bordering practices in East and West that have alienated her as a Balkan female migrant and writer in Germany in order to make visible her inner boundaries of estrangement and to transform her self-imposed exile into the possibility of a better future. It is in the creative act of writing that Zacharieva's heroine embraces fluidity and ambiguity as crucial elements in the process of unbinding, erasing, and transcending the borders that enclose the subject, historically, culturally, socially, and politically. In so doing, she is able to chart her own dynamic space in time that allows her to regain agency and negotiate a sense of self that is positioned in the aporia between restraint and liberation imposed by the Balkanist, Orientalist, and transnational discourses into which Balkan modern subjects are enmeshed.

Juxtaposing Kaminer's oeuvre to that of Dinev and Zacharieva in Chapter 5, it becomes obvious that his diverse characters perform the movement in-between spaces and across borders as a different version of Germany's cosmopolitan story. Choosing to live on the fringes of society, his heroes appear as actors whose inventive everyday practices reveal identification tactics and strategies that topple barriers and open up spaces in which difference is entertained at the joint line of competing (but no less important on the global scale) histories, memories, traditions, and experiences. As in Dinev and Zacharieva's, in Kaminer's work these spaces are also made out of frictions and heterogeneous existences that make the tropes of foreignness and Eastern European Otherness increasingly visible. Nonetheless, Kaminer's vision of Germany and Europe maps out spaces inherently reconfigured by processes of migration and into which the writer has already inserted his alternative vision of Russianness as intrinsic to the creation of a borderless world. It is Kaminer's discursive model of a multicentered Euro-Russian world, where Western and Russian discourses on Europe participate in a more equal manner in the

reconfiguration of existing East/West binaries and the renegotiation of transnational spaces and identities.

On the basis of my readings of Dinev, Zacharieva, and Kaminer's literary visions of the transnational identities of the so-called "New Europeans," I want to propose that in order to understand more fully the processes of crosscultural encounters in German-language writings from Europe's corners, we should not stop here but continue our critical inquiries on the levels of both literary practice and epistemology. There are, in fact, further important questions that my dissertation has raised with regards to neighboring perspectives such as the legacy of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Byzantinism in shaping other forms of self-images in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. It is advisable to trace these empires' particular histories and to consider their present use in both scholarly and popular discourses, as well as their portrayal in German migrant literatures and beyond. These are perspectives that must be addressed as well, and those scholars working within the historical angle I have adopted in this study may have already indicated the primary focus on the Ottoman and Soviet Empires as a limitation of the project's historical-critical scope. I consider this observation not as a limitation, but an impetus, for further research and will use this afterword to develop some lines of inquiry.

Here, I want to mention a recent novel *Wie der Soldat das Grammophon repariert* (*How the Soldier Repairs the Gramophone* 2006) by an even younger writer, the Bosnian-German Saša Stanišić (born in 1972), who migrated to Germany with his family during the wake of the Yugoslav conflict a decade and a half ago. A story about the relationship between history, collective, and individual victimization in the Bosnia of the 1990s, Stanišić's debut novel continues a tradition of Balkan literary representations that are not only found in the border narratives of contemporaries like the two intellectual expatriates Dinev and Zacharieva, but also

in fiction produced by their predecessors on the Balkans such as the Bosnian Ivo Andrić (1892-1975) and the Bulgarian Iordan Iovkov (1880-1937). Like Dinev's story "Die Inschrift," Stanišić's novel is a narrative account of trauma that thematizes violence in the Balkans during the Višegrad massacres in 1992. And like Zacharieva, Stanišić creates a piece of semi-autobiographical fiction where the story of Bosnia is told through the eyes of a first person narrator Alexander, who returns to his mother country as an adult after years spent in his second homeland, Germany. Back in Bosnia, Alexander tries to put the shards of memory together and reconstruct one of his country's most traumatizing events, which he witnessed as a fourteen-year-old. It is a tale written in German, but, like Dinev and Zacharieva's, it is a prose inhabited by the buried voices of Balkan others, who counteract the ready-made story of state ideology and the region's negative outside representation in an attempt to imagine alternative versions of history and world made up from the unofficial narratives of ethnicity, nation, and religion.

Although set in present-day Bosnia, Stanišić's novel is replete with references to the country's not-so-distant imperial past when two competing empires (the Ottoman and the Austro-Hungarian), ethnic conflict, and interrelations gave shape to a hybrid world shared by Bosnian Muslims and Christian Serbs. In this sense, Stanišić's local images of Višegrad are reminiscent of Ivo Andrić's Bosnian works. In Andrić's historical novel *Na Drini Cuprija* (*The Bridge on the Drina* 1945), the main metaphor of history is of a bridge built by the Grand vizier Mehmed Pasha Sokolović on the river Drina in 16<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman Višegrad as a remembrance of the day when he and other Slavic boys were taken by the Ottomans as blood debt and turned into janissary. The bridge over the Drina lacks even the semblance of a positive meaning, however, and the locals reject it from the very beginning:

You can see for yourself that this building work will be the death of all of us; it will eat us all up. [...] A bridge is no good to the poor and to the rayah, but only for the Turks; we can neither raise armies nor carry on trade. (*The Bridge on the Drina* 33)

Once a reality, the bridge on the Drina does not exist today. Yet, the importance of Andrić's portrait of the bridge's geo-historical mapping transformed into the well known metaphor of the Balkans' location as the in-between space, where past and present, East and West, Christians and Muslims blend and clash to the point of (self) destruction, hardly loses its contemporary seriousness. "I am half this, half that. I am a Yugoslav—that means, I am disintegrating" (*How the Soldier* 54). Reflecting on his own ethnically and religiously hybrid background (born to a Serbian father and a Bosnian Muslim mother), Stanišić's hero Alexander reminds us of the continuous explosive in-betweenness in Balkan identities as a split that has resulted from the historically burdened conflictual interests of Europe's imperial powers in the Balkans. Born in times of violent encounters during the Ottoman domination over the Slavic people, the ethnic division along Orthodox, Catholic, and Muslim religious lines continued to exist under the Habsburgs, and is acted out anew in the power struggle for national affiliation that Serbs, Croats, and Muslims in Bosnia faced in the 1990s.

Viewed within their historical perspective, such forms of Balkan segregation, as Balkan scholars have argued, mirror Europe's own history of creating internal exclusionary borders as a means for defining identities and nations (Bjelić, "The Balkans' Imaginary" 19). In this sense, the "Balkans' havoc" is not external to Europe, but lies at the core of Europe as an identity based on exclusionary inclusions (Bjelić 10). With his German-language writings, Stanišić, like other expatriate writers from the Balkans, brings back the Balkans, in general, and Serbia, in

particular, as an important party in the discourse on transnational German identity, confirming my argument about the need for the continuous revision of dominant theoretical positions on migrant writing. I propose that the further investigation of other German-language Eastern European/Balkan diasporic writings like that of Stanišić enables us to create an even greater impact in the larger field of European cultures and literatures. To adopt Bjelić's words to my context, it is only by "counter[ing] the image of borders with the imaginary of borderless life" that transnational fictions in German can prove fundamental in transforming our visions of not only Germany but also the Balkans and Europe as spaces free of totalizing metaphors (12).

Throughout this dissertation, I have argued for the unveiled prominence of the Balkan discursive geography in the writings of migrant writers from the Balkans, as well as in the works of theorist expatriates from the region working in the Western academy. Significant in this aspect are the names Slavoj Žižek and Julia Kristeva and the concealed presence of Balkan ambiguity in their theoretical writings. In his article "The Balkans, Radical Conservatism and Desire," Bjelić brilliantly shows how the Balkan discursive imaginary functions as "a dissonant infrastructure to the transcendent, ahistorical quality" of Kristeva and Žižek's intellectual writings (286-7). Drawing attention to the ways in which both scholars disidentify with their cultures of origin, Bjelić underscores how Kristeva and Žižek's self-orientalizing moves reproduce the hegemonic representations of the Balkans as the Other, the dark side of an enlightened Europe, and, in so doing, perpetuate negative representations of the Balkan identity, which, in turn, counteracts the scholars' "carefully constructed 'cosmopolitanism' and 'universalism'" (Bjelić 286).

Analyses like Bjelić's are, in my opinion, highly relevant in today's climate of migration and in the academic sphere where intellectual exile expatriates have played and will continue to play a significant role in transferring and shaping intellectual capital and knowledge across and

beyond national borders. A reconsideration of the Janus-face of the Balkan imaginary in intellectual labor is, therefore, further called for. However, it is advisable to draw attention to the literary works that intellectuals like Kristeva have also produced. While Bjelić's point is well taken that Kristeva's theoretical works are informed by an "ahistorical" quality, this seems to be not always the case with her detective novels. In my view, her fictional works go beyond that which Western scholars have almost exclusively viewed as a resemblance of her poststructuralist and postmodernist theories of the self, feminism, and language to include the subjective and evocative dimensions of the experience of migration from East to West, alienation, and the intellectual's Balkan origins.

My current study on Balkan intellectuals in diaspora suggests the need to examine Kristeva's semi-autobiographical detective novels *Le vieil homme et les loups* 1991 (trans. *The Old Man and the Wolves* 1994) and *Meurtre à Byzance* 2004 (trans. *Murder in Byzantium* 2006). An article project, "In Search of Lost Time: A Fiction for Self-Discovery" investigates how both novels situate Kristeva's writings in Balkan geopolitics and history, an embeddedness articulated in the writer's preference for characters interested or specializing in Byzantine times (e.g., the Latin scholar in the first novel) and events and historical figures from this period (e.g., the Crusades and the Byzantine princess and historian Anna Comnena). This preference is more explicit in the second novel, where it forms the thematic core of the plot. As implied in its title, the novel revives a traditional set of stereotypes of the Byzantine Empire as an ancient historical setting against which a murder mystery story unfolds. Based on my preliminary analysis of this text, I contend that it is not only the historical aura that surrounds the Byzantine Empire. The Roman Empire's rich cultural heritage also becomes quite important for Julia Kristeva's critique of the current crisis in culture and language. In both novels, this is a critique of the invasion of

banality, religious fundamentalism, the collapse of the East, hatred, mistrust, and the quest for world domination—in short, the ‘malaise’ of the West.

Kristeva explicitly refers to this aspect of her fictional writing in an interview. As she says, for her it was not Greek culture, but “the culture of the Roman Empire just before the advent of Christianity [that] was already in harmony with our own. With Ovid, Suetonius, and Tibullus there was a modern, Christ-like sensitivity that echoes our own anguish” (“*Interview: The Old Man and the Wolves*” 169). With these words, Kristeva sets herself apart from the predominant simplistic views in history and educational textbooks, politics, and journalism about Byzantium being the antipodal reflection of Western history, institutions, and moral and cultural values; that is, the “Other” to European civilization. Active in the novels is the current binary opposition between East and West and Christendom and Islam as a split whose roots run back to the very heart of the Roman Empire and its political disintegration into a Byzantine Greek East and a Latin Catholic West; a separation that has shaped European history and continues to be a key factor in European geopolitics today.

This is certainly not the place for a more extended analysis of Kristeva’s tangled vision of Byzantium and the Balkans, but it should be noted that her novels provide a discussion and a revision of the historical legacy of Byzantinism, whose ghost, like that of Balkanism, has been frequently evoked in reference to the political events in the Balkans and as an explanation of their cultural alterity as a backward region stunted in its development. What is especially important about Kristeva’s novels is the blending of her sophisticated theory of estrangement and migration, and historical reflections about the Byzantine Balkans, to which she further adds her personal, experiential traversals into her search for identity as a Proustian search of times lost in



the Byzantine remnants of her Bulgarian roots. As Kristeva says in an interview with the *New York Times*:

Fiction became my search for lost time, and by using a less formal and conceptual language, I tried to reach those parts of my personality that had not previously found expression. (qtd. in Darrow, “Does European Culture Exist?” n. pag.)

In *Murder in Byzantium*, for instance, Kristeva’s alter ego Stephanie Delacour chooses the “sublanguage” of Byzantium “transmuted into figures and parables, numbers, symbols, and allusions” to “name the unnamable or whatever it is that you wish not to reveal” (*Murder in Byzantium* 69). For her, this means to uncover Europe’s traces in the rich cultural heritage of the Byzantine Balkans and to suggest that the Byzantine identity aspect of Balkan cultures can and should be seen as an imaginary and moldable construct that has emerged as the product of historical narratives, of memory manipulation, and of multiple reinterpretations. “To each his own Byzantium. There are only imaginary Bizantiums,” remarks Chrest-Jones, the historian in the novel (82). In this sense, we can say that it is perhaps not through her intellectual writings but through her fictional works that Kristeva is able to resist, albeit provisionally, the “cultural orthodoxy of her host nation” and to counteract long-standing perceptions of her native Balkans as an uninviting place with a bleak past and an unpromising future on Europe’s historical and academic map (Bjelić, “The Balkans: Radical Conservatism” 287). Because this project assesses the crosscultural dimensions in the works of Balkan intellectuals expatriates beyond the sphere of German literature and academy, it proves significant for broadening the study of minority and diasporic cultures from their national parameters to global and comparative perspectives.

Of course, such efforts to reconceive the significance of Balkan cultures and literatures of migration in the construction of transnational spaces and identities will achieve an impact only if

such efforts draw the attention of wider audiences. Here the role of literary scholars as educators comes into play, since it is their vocation to teach younger generations critical thinking skills and a humanistic outlook on the world. The recent social and political changes in Europe—the fall of the Wall, the Bosnian war, the EU’s unification, and migration—have opened up not only new possibilities for ways of life, but also activated age-old stereotypical representations that continue to essentialize other human collectives and different places in our increasingly global world. The fictional narratives I have analyzed provide examples of literature’s pedagogical task to debunk Balkan and Eastern European stereotypes that have been employed by journalists, media, and politicians in the worst fashion. In that respect, finding new ways for recording, studying, and teaching the political, cultural, and economic transformations of our German-speaking countries is integral to this mission of literature, as it allows for the examination and greater critical sensibility to the experiential modalities and historical patterns that make Balkan migrant cultures and peoples part and parcel of Germany and Europe. Yet, in order to take full advantage of these possibilities, it is necessary that research and teaching bring together seemingly divided academic fields, including Western European, Eastern European, German and Balkan Studies, along with the social sciences, postcolonial, and comparative theoretical thought. And because such an exchange of ideas takes place not only abstractly but also at the level of face-to-face conversations, it is important to seek a dialogue with scholars as well as students at conferences, in the classroom, and on an everyday basis. Each such conversation yields new interpretations of the limits and novelties of the theories used for addressing how Balkan transnational writings envision the crossroads where identities can be reconfigured into a “vital parliament” of European cultures and traditions, a vision to which this study aimed to contribute.

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